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THE
VICISSITUDES OF BESSIE FAIRFAX.

PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

THE VICISSITUDES
OF
BESSIE FAIRFAX.

BY
HOLME LEE,
AUTHOR OF
"BASIL GODFREY'S CAPRICE," "THE BEAUTIFUL MISS BARRINGTON,"
"KATHERINE'S TRIAL," ETC. ETC.

"Not what we could wish, but what we must even put up with."

VOL. III.



LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE.
1874.

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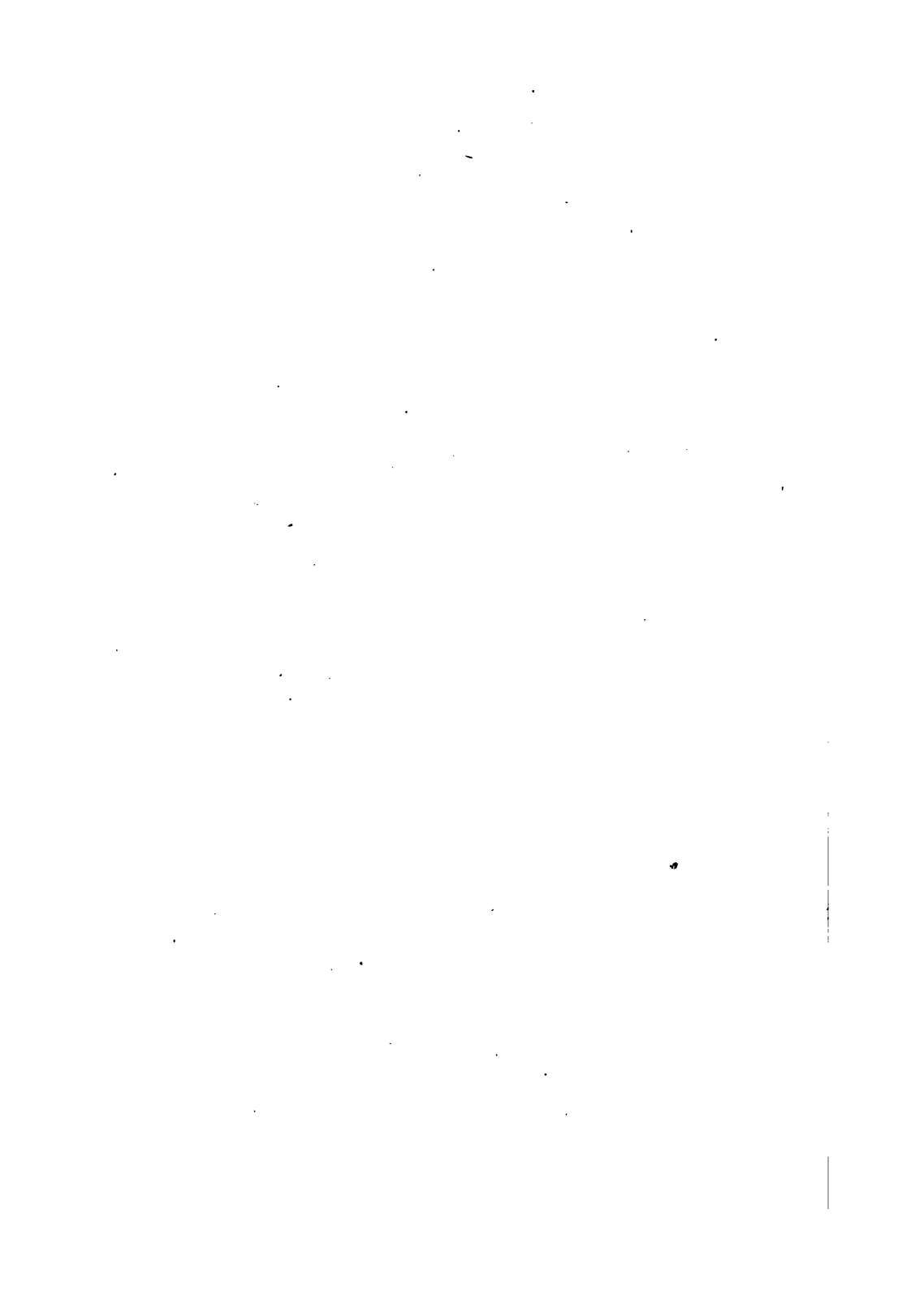
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THE
VICISSITUDES OF BESSIE FAIRFAX.

CHAPTER I.

BESSIE'S PEACEMAKING.

WHEN Bessie Fairfax returned from Castle-mount, she learnt for a first piece of news that Mr Cecil Burleigh had spent two days of her absence at Abbotsmead, and that he had only left in the morning. To this information her grandfather added that he had seen in his time unsuccessful lovers more dejected. Bessie laughed and blushed, and said she was glad to hear he was in good spirits—and this was their first and last allusion to the crowning episode of her visit to Brentwood. The Squire gave her one searching look, and thought it wisdom to be silent.

The green rides of the woods and glades of the park were all encumbered with fallen leaves. The last days of autumn were flown, and winter was come. The sound of the huntsman's horn was heard in the fields, and the Squire came out in his weather-stained scarlet coat to enjoy the sport which was the greatest pleasure life had left for him. One fine soft morning at the end of November the meet was at Kirkham Turnpike, and Abbotsmead entertained the gentlemen of the hunt at breakfast.

Bessie rode a little way with her grandfather, and would have ridden further, but he sent her back with Ranby. Mr Cecil Burleigh had once expressed a prejudice against fox-hunting ladies, and when Mr Fairfax saw his granddaughter the admiration of the miscellaneous gathering, and her acquaintance claimed by even Mr Gifford, he adopted it. Bessie was disappointed. She liked the exercise, the vivacity of the sport, and Janey

went so beautifully, but when her grandfather spoke, she quietly submitted. Sir Edward Lucas, though he was charmed with her figure on horseback, was still more charmed by her obedience.

The burden of Bessie's present life threatened to be the tedium of nothing to do. She could not read, practise her songs, and learn poetry by heart all the hours of the day—less than three sufficed her often. If she had been bred in a country-house, she would have possessed numerous interests that she inevitably lacked. She was a stranger amongst the villagers—neither old nor young knew her. There was little suffering to engage her sympathy or poverty to invite her help. At Kirkham there were no long accumulated neglects to reform as there was at Morte, and to Morte Mr Fairfax forbade her to go. She had a liberal allowance, and not half ways enough to spend it, so she doubled her allowance to Miss Hague on behalf of her



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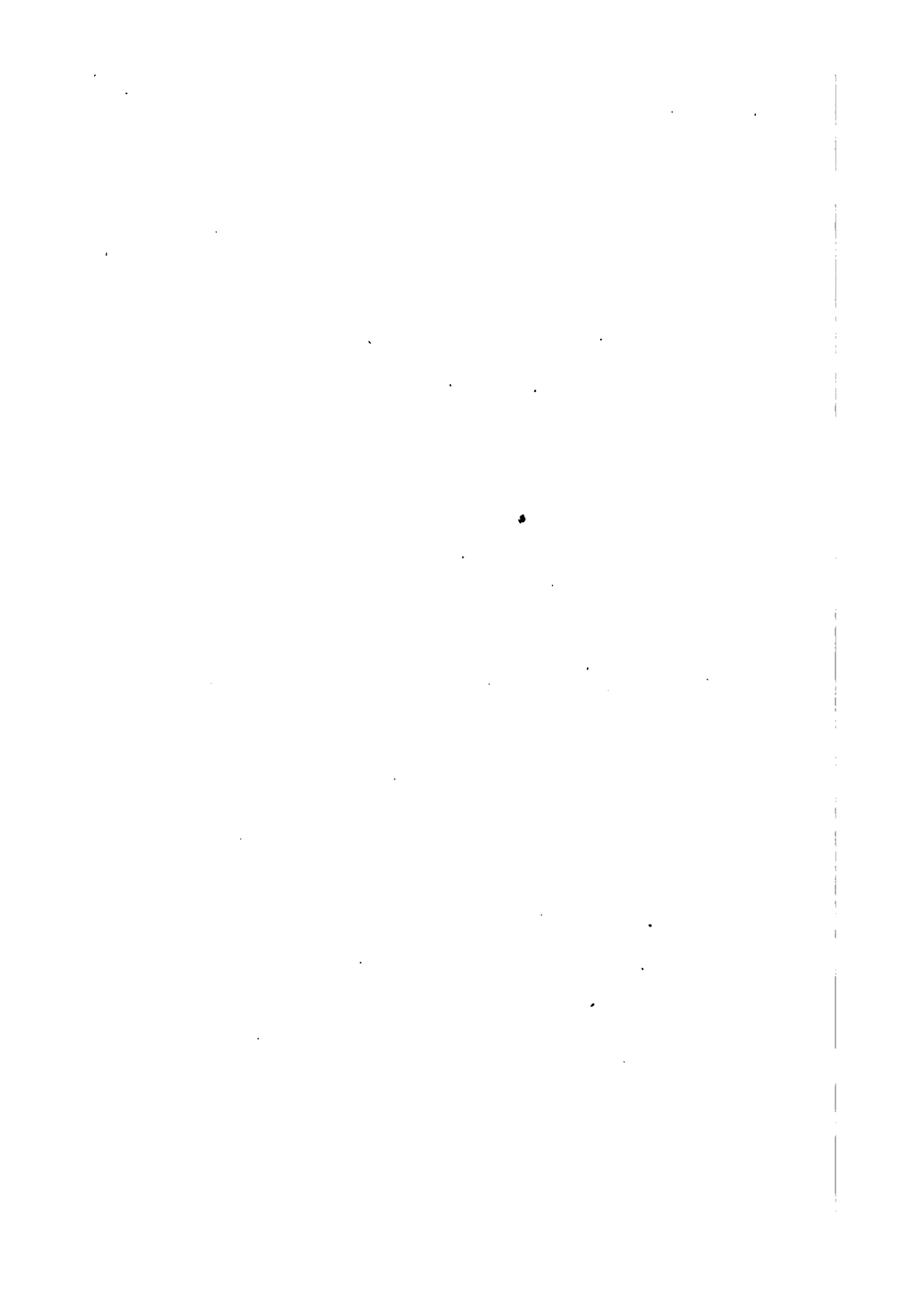




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FAX.



THE
VICISSITUDES OF BESSIE FAIRFAX.

—But to go back to those boys—do nothing without first speaking to Mr Fairfax.”

Bessie demurred, and still believed her own bolder device the best, but she allowed herself to be overruled, and watched for an opportunity of speaking. Undoubtedly Mr Fairfax loved his granddaughter with more respect for her independent will than he might have done had they been together always. He had denied her no reasonable request yet, and he granted her present prayer so readily that she was only sorry she had not preferred it earlier.

“Grandpapa, you will give me a Christmas gift, will you not?” she said one evening after dinner about a week before that festive season.

“Yes, Elizabeth. What would you like?” was his easy reply. It was a satisfaction to hear that she had a wish.

“I should like to have my two little cousins from Norminster—Justus and Laury. They would quite enliven us.”

Mr Fairfax was evidently taken by surprise. Still he did not rebuke her audacity. He was silent for a minute or two as if reflecting, and when he answered her, it was with all the courtesy that he could have shown towards a guest for whose desires he was bound to feel the utmost deference. "Certainly, Elizabeth," said he. "You have a right to be here, as I told you at your first coming, and it would be hard that I should forbid you any visitor that would enliven you. Have the little boys, by all means, if you wish it, and make yourself as happy as you can."

Elizabeth thanked him warmly. "I will write to-morrow—Oh, I know they may come—my Uncle Laurence promised me!" said she. "And the day before Christmas Eve Mrs Betts and I will go for them. I am so glad!"

Mr Fairfax did not check her gay exuberance, and all the house heard what was to be with unfeigned joy. Mrs Stokes rejoiced too, and pledged her own sons as playfellows for

the little visitors. And when the appointed time came Bessie did as she had said, and made a journey to Norminster, taking Mrs Betts with her, to bring the children over. Their father and pretty young mother consented to their going with the less reluctance because it seemed the first step towards the re-establishment of kindly relations with the offended Squire; and Sally was sent with them.

“Next Christmas you will come too,” said Bessie, happier than any queen in the exercise of her office as peacemaker; and important also as being put in charge of those incomparable boys—for Sally was, of course, under superior orders.

The first drawback to her intense delight was a whimper from Laury as he lost sight of his mamma; and the next drawback was that Justus asked to be taken home again the moment the train reached Mitford Junction. These little troubles were quickly composed,

however, though liable, of course, to break out again ; and Bessie felt flushed and uneasy lest the darling boys should fail of making a pleasant first impression on grandpapa. Alas, for her disquiets ! She need have felt none. Jonquil received her at the door with a sad countenance ; and Macky, as she came forward to welcome the little gentlemen, betrayed that her temper had been tried even to tears not very long before. Jonquil did not wait to be inquired 'of respecting his master, but immediately began to say, in reply to his young-lady's look of troubled amazement : "The Squire, Miss, has gone on a journey. I was to tell you that he had left you the house to yourself."

"Gone on a journey ? But he will return before night ?" said Bessie.

"No, Miss. We are to expect him this day week—when Mr Laurence's children have gone back to Norminster," explained the old servant in a lower voice.

Bessie comprehended the whole case in-

stantly. Macky was relieving her pent feelings by making a fuss with the little boys, and giving Mrs Betts her mind on the matter. The group stood disconcerted in the hall for several minutes, the door open, and the low winter sun shining upon them. Bessie did not speak—she could not. She gazed at the children, pale herself and trembling all over. Justus began to ask where was grandpapa, and Laury repeated his question like a lisping echo. There was no answer to give them, but they were soon pacified in the old nursery where their father had played, and were made quite happy with a grand parade of new toys on the floor, expressly provided for the occasion. Bed-time came early, and Bessie was relieved when it did come. Never in the whole course of her life had she felt so hurt, so insulted, so injured—and yet she was pained, intensely pained, for the old man too. Perhaps he had meant her to be so, and that was her punishment. Jonquil could give her no information as to

whither his master had gone, but he offered a conjecture that he had most probably gone up to London.

If it was any comfort to know that the old servants of the house sympathised with her, Bessie had that. They threw themselves heart and soul into the work of promoting the pleasure of the little visitors. Jonquil proved an excellent substitute for grandpapa, and Macky turned out an inexhaustible treasury of nice harmless things to eat, of funny rhymes to sing, and funny stories to tell in a dramatic manner. Still it was a holiday spoilt. It was not enjoyed in the servants' hall nor in the house-keeper's room. No amount of Yule logs or Yule cakes could make a merry Christmas of it that year. All the neighbours had heard with satisfaction that Mr Fairfax's little grandsons were to be brought to Abbotsmead, and such as had children made a point of coming over with them, so that the way in which Miss Fairfax's effort at peace-making had failed was

soon generally known, and, as generally, disapproved. Mrs Stokes, that indignant young matron, qualified the Squire's behaviour as "Quite abominable ;" but she declared that she would not vex herself if she were Miss Fairfax, "No, indeed !" Bessie tried hard not. She tried to be dignified ; but her disappointment was too acute, and her grandfather's usage of her too humiliating to be borne with her ordinary philosophy.

She let her Uncle Laurence know what had happened by letter, and on the day fixed for the children to go home again she went with them, attended by Mrs Betts as before. Mr Laurence Fairfax was half amused at the method by which his father had evaded Bessie's bold attempt to rule him, and his blossom of a wife was much too happy to care for the old Squire's perversity unless he cared ; but they were both sorry for Bessie.

"My grandfather lets me have everything but what I want," she said with a tinge of

riefful humour. "He surrounds me with every luxury, and denies me the drink of cold water that I thirst for. I wish I could escape from his tyranny ! We were beginning to be friends, and this has undone it all. A refusal would not have been half so unkind !"

"There is nothing but time to trust to," said her Uncle Laurence. "My father's resentment is not active, but it lasts."

Bessie was quite alone that long evening—the last of the old year—at Beechhurst or at Brook there was certainly a party. Nor had she any intimation of the time of her grandfather's return beyond what Jonquil had been able to give her a week ago. He had not written since he left, and an accumulation of letters awaited him in his private room—Jonquil having been unable to forward any for want of an address. The dull routine of the house proceeded for three days more, and then the master reappeared at luncheon without notice to anybody.

Mr Fairfax took his seat at the table, ate hungrily, and looked so exactly like himself, and so unconscious of having done anything to provoke anger, to give pain or cause anxiety, that Bessie's imaginary difficulties in anticipation of his return were instantly removed. He made polite inquiries after Janey and Joss, and even hoped that Bessie had been enlivened by her little cousins' visit. She would certainly not have mentioned them if he had not, but, as he asked the question, she was not afraid to answer him.

"Yes," said she, "children are always good company to me, especially boys; and they behaved so nicely, though they are very high-spirited, that I don't think they would have been inconvenient if you had stayed at home."

"Indeed? I am glad to hear they are being well brought up," said the Squire; and then he turned to Jonquil, and asked for his letters.

CHAPTER II.

ABBOTSMEAD IN SHADOW.

MR FAIRFAX's letters were brought to him, and after glancing cursorily through the batch, he gathered them all up, and went off to his private room. Bessie conjectured that he would be busy for the rest of the afternoon, and she took a walk in the park until dusk, when she returned to the house, and retired to her own parlour. The dressing-bell rang at a quarter to seven, as usual, and Mrs Betts came to assist at her young lady's toilette. Being dressed, Bessie descended to the octagon-room, which she found empty.

It was a fine, frosty night, and the sky was full of stars. She put aside a curtain, and looked out into the wintry garden, feeling more than ever alone and desolate amidst the

grandeur of her home. It seemed as if the last unkindness she had suffered was the worst of all, and her heart yearned painfully towards her friends in the Forest. Oh, for their simple, warm affection ! She would have liked to be sitting with her mother in the old-fashioned dining-room at Beechhurst, listening for the doctor's return, and the clink of Miss Hoyden's hoofs on the hard frozen road, as they had listened often in the winters long ago. She forgot herself in that reverie, and scarcely noticed that the door had been opened and shut again until her grandfather spoke from the hearth, saying that Jonquil had announced dinner.

The amiable disposition in which the Squire had come home appeared to have passed off completely. Bessie had seen him often crabbed and sarcastic, but never so irritable as he was that evening. Nothing went right from the soup to the dessert, and Jonquil even stirred the fire amiss. Some matter in his correspond-

ence had put him out. But as he made no allusion to his grievance, Bessie was, of course, blind and deaf to his untoward symptoms. The next day he went to Norminster to see Mr John Short, and came back in no better humour—in a worse humour if possible, and Mrs Stokes whispered to Bessie the explanation of it.

Mr Fairfax had inherited a law-suit with a small estate in Durham, bequeathed to him by a distant connection, and this suit, after being for years a blister on his peace, had been finally decided against him. The estate was lost and the plague of the suit with it, but there were large costs to pay, and the time was inconvenient.

“Your grandfather contributed heavily to the election of Mr Cecil Burleigh in the prospect of an event which it seems is not to be,” concluded the little lady with reproachful significance. “My Arthur told me all about it (Mr Fairfax consults him on everything)—

and now there are I don't know how many thousands to pay in the shape of back-rents, interest, and costs—but it is an immense sum."

Bessie was sorry—very sorry, and showed it with so much sense and sympathy that her grandfather presently revealed his vexations to her himself, and having once mentioned them, he found her a resource to complain to again. She hoped that he would get over his defeat the sooner for talking of it, but he did not. He was utterly convinced that he had right on his side, and he wanted a new trial, from which Mr John Short could hardly dissuade him. The root of his profound annoyance was that Abbotsmead must be encumbered to pay for the lost suit unless his son Frederick who had ready money accumulated from the unspent fortune of his wife, would come to the rescue. In answer to his father's appeal Frederick wrote back that a certain considerable sum which he mentioned was at his

service ; but, as for the bulk of his wife's fortune, he intended it to revert to her family. Mr Laurence Fairfax made, through the lawyer, an offer of further help to keep Abbotsmead clear of mortgages, and with the bitter remark that it was Laurence's interest to do so, the Squire accepted his offer.

So much at this crisis did Bessie hear of money and the burden and anxiety of great estates that she thought poverty must be far preferable. The Squire developed a positively bad temper under his worries. And he was not irritable only. By degrees he became ill, and yet would have no advice. Jonquil was greatly troubled about him, and when he refused to mount his horse one splendid hunting morning in February, though he was all equipped and ready, Bessie also began to wonder what ailed him besides crossness—for he was a man of strong constitution, and not subject to fanciful infirmities.

Early in March Mr Frederick Fairfax wrote

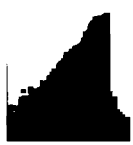
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Early in March Mr Frederick Fairfax wrote



home that his Russian tour was accomplished, and that he was impatient to be on board his yacht again. The weather was exceedingly rough and tempestuous later in the month, and the Squire, watching the wrack of the storm on the wolds, often expressed anxiety lest his son should be rash and venturesome enough to trust himself out of port in such weather. Everybody was relieved when April opened with sunny showers, and the long and severe winter seemed to be at an end. It had not made Bessie more in love with her life at Abbotsmead—there had, indeed, been times of inexpressible dreariness in it, very trying to her fortitude. With the dawning of brighter days in spring she could not but think of the Forest with fresh longing; and she watched each morning's post for the arrival of that invitation to Fairfield which Lady Latimer had promised to send. At length, it came, and after brief demur, received a favourable answer. The Squire had a mortified con-

sciousness that his granddaughter's life was not very cheerful ; and though he did not refuse her wish, he was unable to grant it heartily. However, the fact of his consent overcame the manner of it, and Bessie was enjoying the pleasures of anticipation, and writing ecstatically to her mother, when an event happened that threw Abbotsmead into mourning, and changed the bent even of her desires.

One chilly evening after dinner, when she had retreated to the octagon-parlour, and was dreaming by the fireside in the dusk alone, Jonquil, with visage white as a ghost, ushered in Mr John Short. He had walked over from Mitford Junction, in the absence of any vehicle to bring him on, and was jaded and depressed, though with an air of forced composure. As Jonquil withdrew to seek his master the lawyer advanced into the firelight, and Bessie saw at once that he came on some sad errand. Her grandfather had gone, she

believed, to look after his favourite hunter, which had met with a severe sprain a week ago, but she was not sure ; for he had been more and more restless for some time past, had taken to walking at unaccustomed hours, to neglecting his correspondence, leaving letters for days unopened, and betraying various other signs of a mind unsettled and disturbed. It had appeared to Bessie that he was always in a state of distressed expectancy, but what for she had no idea. The appearance of Mr John Short without previous notice, suggested new vexation connected with the lawsuit, but when she asked if he were again the messenger of bad news, he startled her with a much more tragical announcement.

“I am sorry to say that I am, Miss Fairfax. Mr Frederick has not lived much at home of late years, but I fear that it will be a terrible shock to his father to hear that he is lost,” said Mr John Short.

"Lost!" echoed Bessie. "Lost! Oh, where? Poor grandpapa!"

"On the Danish coast. His yacht was wrecked in one of the gales of last month, and all on board perished. The washing ashore of portions of the wreck leaves no doubt of the disaster. The consul at the nearest port communicated with the authorities in London, and the intelligence reached me some days ago in a form that left little to hope. This morning the worst was confirmed."

Bessie sat down feeling inexpressibly sorrowful. "Grandpapa is out somewhere—Jonquil is seeking him. Oh, how I wish I could be more of a help and comfort to him!" she said raising her eyes to the lawyer's face.

"It is a singular thing, Miss Fairfax, but your grandfather never seems to want help or comfort like other men. He shuts himself up and broods—just broods, when he is grieved or angry. He was very genial and pleasant as a young man, but he had a disappointment

of the affections that quite soured him. I do not know that he ever made a friend of any one but his sister Dorothy. They were on the continent for a year after that affair, and she died in Italy. He was a changed man when he came home, and he married a woman of good family—but nobody was, perhaps, more of a stranger to him than his own wife. It was generally remarked. And he seemed to care as little for her children as he did for her. I have often been surprised to see that he was indifferent whether they came to Abbotsmead or not; yet the death of Mr Geoffry, your father, hurt him severely, and Mr Frederick's will be no less a pain."

"I wish I had not vexed him about my Uncle Laurence's boys. We were becoming good friends before," said Bessie.

"Oh, the Squire will not bear malice for that. He discriminates between the generosity of your intention towards the children, and what he probably mistook for a will to rule himself.

He acted very perversely in going out of the way."

"Does my Uncle Laurence know the news you bring?"

"Yes. But he desired me to be the first medium of it.—Jonquil is a long while seeking his master."

A very long while. So long that Bessie rang the bell to inquire, and the little page answered it. The master was not come in, he said; they had sent every way to find him. Bessie rose in haste, and followed by Mr John Short, went along the passage to her grandfather's private room. That was dark and empty, and so was the lobby by which it communicated with the garden and the way to the stables. She was just turning back when she bethought her to open the outer door, and there, at the foot of the steps on the gravel walk, lay the Squire. She did not scream nor cry, but ran down and helped to carry him in, holding his white head tenderly.

For a minute they laid him on the couch in the justice-room, and servants came running with lights.

"It is not death," said Mrs Betts, peering close in the unconscious face. "The fire is out here—we will move him to his chamber at once."

As they raised him again one stiffened hand that clutched a letter relaxed, and dropped it. The lawyer picked it up, and gave it to Miss Fairfax. It was a week old—a sort of official letter recording the wreck of the *Foam*, and the loss of her crew. The suddenness and tragical character of the news had been too much for the poor father. In the shock of it he had apparently staggered into the air, and had fallen unconscious—smitten with paralysis. Such was the verdict of Mr Wilson, the general practitioner at Mitford, who arrived first upon the scene; and Dr Marks, the experienced physician from Norminster, who came in the early morning, supported his

opinion. The latter was a stranger to the house, and before he left it, he asked to see Miss Fairfax.

The night had got over between waiting and watching, and Bessie had not slept—had not even lain down to rest. She begged that Dr Marks might be shown to her parlour, and Mr John Short appeared with him. Mrs Betts had put over her shoulders a white cachemire wrapper, and with her fair hair loosened and flowing, she sat by the window overlooking the fields and the river where the misty morning was breaking slowly into sunshine. Both the gentlemen were impressed by a certain power in her, a fortitude and gentleness combined that are a woman's best strength in times of trouble and difficulty. They could speak to her without fear of creating fresh embarrassment, as plainly as it was desirable that they should speak ; for she was manifestly aware of a responsibility devolving upon her.

“Though I apprehend no immediate danger,

Miss Fairfax, it is to be regretted that this sad moment finds Mr Fairfax at variance with his only surviving son," said Dr Marks. "Mr Laurence Fairfax ought to be here. It is probable that his father has not made a final disposition of his affairs—indeed, I understand from Mr John Short that he has not done so"——

"Oh, does that matter now?" said Bessie.

"Mr Fairfax's recovery might be promoted if his mind were quite at ease. If he should wish to transact any business with his lawyer, you may be required to speak of your own wishes. Do not waste the favourable moment. The stroke has not been severe, and I have good hopes of restoration, but when the patient is verging on seventy, we can never be sure."

Dr Marks went away, leaving Mr Wilson to watch the case. Mr John Short then explained to Bessie the need there was that she should be prepared for any event—a rally of consciousness was what he hoped for, perfect,

whether tending to recovery, or the precursor of dissolution. For he knew of no will that Mr Frederick had made, and he knew that since the discovery of Mr Laurence's marriage the Squire had destroyed the last will of his own making, and that he had not even drawn out a rough scheme of his further intentions. The entailed estates were, of course, inalienable—those must pass to his son and his son's son—but there were houses and lands besides over which he had the power of settlement. Bessie listened, but found it very hard to give her mind to these considerations, and said so.

“My Uncle Laurence is the person to talk to,” she suggested.

“Probably he will arrive before the day is over—but you are to be thought of—you are to be provided for, Miss Fairfax.”

“Oh, I don't care for myself at all,” said Bessie.

“The more need then that some one else should care for you,” replied Mr John Short.

Inquirers daily besieged Abbotsmead for news of the Squire. Mr Laurence Fairfax came over, and Mr John Short stayed on, expecting his opportunity, while slowly the old man recovered up to a certain point. But his constitution was permanently weakened, and his speech indistinct. Jonquil, Macky, and Mrs Betts were his nurses, and the first person that he was understood to ask for was Elizabeth. Bessie was so glad of his recollection that she went to him with a bright face—the first bright face that had come about his bed yet, and he was evidently pleased. She took up one of his hands and stroked and kissed it, and knelt down to bring herself nearer to him, all with that affectionate kindness that his life had missed ever since his sister Dorothy died.

“You are better, grandpapa ; you will soon be up, and out of doors again,” said she cheerfully.

He gave her no answer, but lay composed

with his eyes resting upon her. It was doubtful whether the cause of his illness had recurred to his weakened memory, for he had not attempted to speak of it. She went on to tell him what friends and neighbours had been to ask after his health—Mr Chiverton, Sir Edward Lucas, Mr Oliver Smith; and what letters to the same purport she had received from Lady Latimer, Lady Angleby, Mr Cecil Burleigh and others, to which she had replied. He acknowledged each item of her information with a glance, but he made no return inquiries.

Mr Chiverton had called that day, and the form in which he carried intelligence home to his wife was: "Poor Fairfax will not die of this bout, but he has got his first warning."

Mrs Chiverton was sorry, but she did not refrain from speculating on how Miss Fairfax would be influenced in her fortunes by the triple catastrophe of her Uncle Laurence's marriage, her Uncle Frederick's death, and her

grandfather's impending demise. "I suppose if Mr Laurence were unmarried, as all the world believed him to be, she would stand now as the greatest prospective heiress in this part of the county! If it was her fortune Mr Cecil Burleigh wanted, he has had a deliverance."

"I am far from sure that Burleigh thinks so," returned Mr Chiverton significantly.

"Oh, I imagined that projected marriage was one of convenience—a family compact."

"In the first instance, so it was. But the young lady's rosy simplicity caught Burleigh's fancy—and it is still in the power of Mr Fairfax to make his granddaughter rich."

Whether Mr Fairfax would make his granddaughter rich was debated in circles where it was not a personal interest, but, of course, it was discussed with much livelier vivacity where it was. Lady Angleby expressed a confident expectation that as Miss Fairfax had been latterly brought up in anticipation of heiress-

ship, her grandfather would endow her with a noble fortune, and Miss Burleigh, with ulterior views for her brother, ventured to hope the same. But Mr Fairfax was in no haste to set his house in order. He saw his son Laurence for a few minutes twice, but gave him no encouragement to linger at Abbotsmead, and his reply to Mr John Short on the only occasion when he openly approached the subject of will-making was: "There is time enough yet."

The household was put into mourning ; but as there was no bringing home of the dead, and no funeral, the event of the eldest son's death passed with little outward mark. Elizabeth was her grandfather's chief companion indoors, and she was cheerful for his sake, under circumstances that were tryingly oppressive. To keep up to her duty, she rode daily, rain or fair, and towards the month's end there were many soft, wet days when all the wolds were wrapt in mist. People watched her go by often, with Joss at Janey's heels, and

Ranby following behind, and said they were sorry for Miss Fairfax—it was very sad for so young a girl to have to bear, unsupported, the burden of her grandfather's declining old age. For the Squire was still consistent in his obstinacy in refusing to be gracious to his son and his son's wife and children, and Bessie, on her Uncle Laurence's advice, refrained from mentioning them any more. Old Jonquil alone had greater courage.

One evening the Squire after lying long silent, broke out with : “ Poor Fred is gone ! ” —the first spontaneous allusion to his loss that he had made.

Jonquil hastened to him : “ My dear master, my dear master ! ” he lamented. “ Oh, sir, you have but one son now ! forgive him, and let the little boys come home—for your own sake, dear master.”

“ They will come home, as you call it, when I follow poor Fred. My son Laurence stands in no need of forgiveness—he has done me

no wrong. Strange women and children would be in my way—they are better where they are." Thus had the Squire once answered every plea on behalf of his son Geoffry. Jonquil remembered very well, and held his peace, sighing as one without hope.

CHAPTER III.

DIPLOMATIC.

BESSIE FAIRFAX gave up her visit to the Forest of her own accord in her pitying reluctance to leave her grandfather. She wrote to Lady Latimer and to her mother, more at length. They were disappointed but not surprised.

“Now they will prove what she is ; a downright good girl, not an atom of selfishness about her,” said Mr Carnegie to his wife with tender triumph.

“Yes, God bless her ! Bessie will wear well in trouble—but I am very wishful to see her, and hear her own voice about that gentleman Lady Latimer talked of.” Lady Latimer had made a communication to the doctor’s wife respecting Mr Cecil Burleigh.

Mr Carnegie had nothing to advise. He felt tolerably sure that Bessie would tell her mother every serious matter that befel her, and as she had not mentioned this, he drew the inference that it was not serious.

The first warm days of summer saw Mr Fairfax out again, walking in the garden with a stick and the support of his granddaughter's shoulder. She was an excellent and patient companion, he said. Indeed, Bessie could forget herself entirely in another's want, and since this claim for care and helpfulness had been made upon her the tedium of life oppressed her no more. It was thus that Mr Cecil Burleigh next saw her again. He had taken his seat in the House, and had come down to Brentwood for a few days; and when he called to visit his old friend, Jonquil sent him round to the south terrace where Mr Fairfax was walking with Bessie in the sun.

In her black dress Bessie looked taller, more womanly, and there was a sweet peace and

kindness in her countenance, which, combined with a sudden blush at the sight of him, caused him to discover in her new graces, and a more touching beauty than he had been able to discern before. Mr Fairfax was very glad to see him, and interested to hear all he had to tell. Since he had learnt to appreciate at their real worth his granddaughter's homely virtues, his desire for her union with this gentleman had revived. He had the highest opinion of Mr Cecil Burleigh's disposition, and he would be thankful to put her in his keeping—a jewel worth having.

Presently Bessie was released from her attendance, and the visitor took her place—her grandfather wished to speak to Mr Cecil Burleigh alone. He began by reverting to the old project of their marriage, and was easily satisfied with an assurance that the gentleman desired it with all his heart. Miss Julia Gardiner's wedding had not yet taken place. She had been delicate through the

winter, and Mr Brotherton had succumbed to a sharp attack of gout in the early spring. So there had been delay after delay, but the engagement continued in force, and Mr Cecil Burleigh had not repeated his indecorous visit. He believed that he was quite weaned from that temptation.

Mr Fairfax gave him every encouragement to renew his siege to Elizabeth, and promised him a dower with her if he succeeded that should compensate for her loss of position as heiress of Abbotsmead. It was an understood thing that Mr Cecil Burleigh could not afford to marry a scantily portioned wife, and a whisper got abroad that Miss Fairfax was to prosper in her fortunes as she behaved, and to be rich or poor according as she married to please her grandfather or persevered in refusing his choice. If Bessie heard it, she behaved as though she heard it not. She went on being good to the old man with a most complete and unconscious self-denial—read to

him, wrote for him, walked and drove with him at his will and pleasure, which began to be marked with all the exacting caprice of senility. And the days, weeks, months slipped round again to golden September. Monotony abridges time, and looking behind her, Bessie could hardly believe that it was over a year ago since she came home from France.

One day her grandfather observed or imagined that she looked paler than her wont. He had a letter in his hand which he gave to her, saying : " You were disappointed of your visit to Fairfield in the spring, Elizabeth—would you like to go now ? Lady Latimer renews her invitation, and I will spare you for a week or two."

Oh, the surprise and delight of this unexpected bounty ! Bessie blushed with gratitude. She was the most grateful soul alive, and for the smallest mercies. Lady Latimer wrote that she should not find Fairfield dull ; for Dora Meadows was on a long stay there, and she

expected her friend Mr Logger, and probably other visitors. Mr Fairfax watched his granddaughter narrowly through the perusal of the document. There could be no denial that she was eagerness itself to go—but whether she had any motive deeper than the renewal of love with the family amidst which she had been brought up, he could not ascertain. There was a great jealousy in his mind concerning that young Musgrave of whose visit to Bayeux Mr Cecil Burleigh had told him; and a settled purpose to hinder Elizabeth from what he would have called an unequal match. At the same time that he would not force her will, he would have felt fully justified in thwarting it; but he had a hope that the romance of her childish memories would fade at contact with present realities. Lady Latimer had suggested this possible solution of a difficulty, and Lady Angleby had supported her, and had agreed that it was time now to give Mr Cecil Burleigh a new opportunity of urging his suit,

and the coy young lady a chance of comparing him with those whom her affection and imagination had^d invested with greater attractions. There was feminine diplomacy in this, and the joyful accident that appeared to Bessie a piece of spontaneous kindness and good-fortune was the result of a well-laid and well-matured plan. However, as she remained in blissful ignorance of the design, there was no shadow forecast upon her pleasure, and she prepared for a fortnight's absence with satisfaction unalloyed.

"You are quite sure you will not miss me, grandpapa—quite sure you can do without me?" she affectionately pleaded.

"Yes, yes, I can do without you. I shall miss you, and shall be glad to see you home again; but you have deserved your holiday, and Lady Latimer might feel hurt if I refused to let you go."

Before leaving Woldshire, Bessie went to Norminster. The old house in Minster Court

was more delightful to her than ever. There was another little boy in the nursery now, called Richard after his grandfather. Bessie had to seek Mrs Laurence Fairfax at the Manor House where Lady Eden was celebrating the birthday of her eldest son. She was seated in the garden conversing with a young Mrs Tindal, amidst a group of mothers besides, whose children were at play on the grass. Mr Laurence Fairfax was a man of philosophic benevolence, and when advances were made to his wife (who had a sense and cleverness beyond anything that could have been expected in anything so bewilderingly pretty) by ladies of the rank to which he had raised her, he met them with courtesy, and she had now two friends in Lady Eden and Mrs Tindal, whose society she especially enjoyed, because they all had babies, and nearly of an age. Bessie told her grandfather where and in what company she had found her little cousins and their mother. The Squire was

silent but he was not affronted. No results, however, came of her information, and she left Abbotsmead the next morning without any further reference to the family in Minster Court.

CHAPTER IV.

SUNDAY MORNING AT BEECHHURST.

BESSIE FAIRFAX arrived at Fairfield late on Saturday night, and had the warmest welcome from Lady Latimer. They were only four at dinner. Mr Logger and Dora Meadows made up the quartette, and as she was tired with her journey, and the conversation both at table and in the drawing-room was literary and political, she was thankful to be dismissed to her room at an early hour. It was difficult to believe that she was actually within two miles of home. She could see nothing from her window for the night-dews, and she woke on Sunday morning to a thick Forest mist ; but by nine o'clock it had cleared, and it was a sumptuous day. She was full of happy excitement, and proposed to set off betimes and

walk to church. Lady Latimer, in her most complacent humour, bade her do exactly what she liked—there was Dora to accompany her if she walked, or there was room in the carriage that would convey herself and Mr Logger.

The young ladies preferred to walk. Bessie had ridden that road with Mr Carnegie many and many a time, but had walked it seldom ; for there were short cuts through the brush-wood and heather that she was wont to pursue in her gipsy excursions with the doctor's boys. But these were not paths for Sunday. She recollected going along that road with Lady Latimer and her grandfather sorely against her inclination ; and returning by the same way with her grandfather and Mr Wiley, when the rector, admonishing her on the virtue of humility, roused her pride and ire by his reminder of the lowly occupations to which her early patronesses had destined her. She laughed to herself, but she blushed too ; for the recollection was not altogether agreeable.

As they drew near to Beechhurst one familiar spot after another called her attention. Then the church-bells began to ring for morning service, and they were at the entrance of the town-street, with its little bow-windowed shops shut up, and its pretty thatched cottages half buried in flowery gardens that made sweet the air. Bessie's heart beat fast and faster as she recognised one old acquaintance after another. Some looked at her and looked again, and did not know her; but most of those she remembered had a nod, a smile, or a kind word for her, and she smiled on all. They all seemed like friends. Now Miss Wort rushed out of her gate, and rushed back, something necessary forgotten—gloves or prayer-book probably. Then the school-children swarmed forth like bees from a hive, loudly exhorted to peaceable behaviour by jolly Miss Buff, who was too much absorbed in her duty of marshalling them in order to walk the twenty yards to church to see her young friend, at

first, but cried out in a gust of enthusiasm when she did see her : “ Oh, you dear little Bessie, who would have thought it ? I never heard you were coming. What a surprise for them all ! They will be delighted ! ”

“ I am staying at Fairfield,” said Bessie. “ There had been so many disappointments before that I would not promise again. But here I am—and it seems almost too good to be true ! ”

“ Here you are, and a picture of health and beauty—you don’t mind my telling you that ! Nobody can say Woldshire disagrees with you ! ”

They walked on. They came in sight of the King’s Arms—of the doctor’s house. “ There is dear old Jack in the porch,” said Bessie ; and Miss Buff with a kind, sympathetic nod, turned off to the church gate, and left her. Jack marched down the path and Willy followed. Then Mrs Carnegie appeared, hustling dilatory Tom before her, and leading by

the hand Polly, a little white-frocked girl of nine. As they issued into the road Bessie stepped more quickly forward. The boys stared at the elegant young lady in mourning, and even her mother gazed for one moment with grave, unrecognising scrutiny. It was but for one moment, and then the flooded blue eyes and tremulous lips revealed who it was.

"Why, it is our Bessie!" cried Jack; and sprang at her with a shout, quite forgetful of Sunday sobriety.

"O Jack!—but you are taller than I am now!" said she, arresting his rough embrace, and giving her hand to her mother. They kissed each other, and deferring all explanations, Bessie whispered: "May I come home with you after service, and spend the day?"

"Yes, yes—father will be in then. He has had to go to Mrs Christie—Mr Robb has been attending her lately, but the moment she is worse nothing will pacify her but seeing her old doctor."

They crossed the road to the church in a group. Mr Phipps came up at the moment, grotesque and sharp as ever. "Cinderella!" exclaimed he, lifting his hat with ceremonious politeness. "But where is the prince?" looking round, and feigning surprise.

"Oh, the prince has not come yet," said Bessie with her beautiful blush.

Mrs Carnegie emitted a gentle sound, calling everybody to order, and they entered the church. Bessie halted at the Carnegie pew, but the children filled it, and as she knew those boys were only kept quiet during service by maternal control, she passed on to the Fairfield pew in the chancel where Dora Meadows was already ensconced. Lady Latimer presently arrived alone—Mr Logger had committed himself to an opinion that it was a shame to waste such a glorious morning in church, and had declined, at the last moment, to come. He preferred to criticise preachers without hearing them.

The congregation was much fuller than Bessie remembered it, formerly. Beechhurst had reconciled itself to its pastor, and had found him not so very bad after all. There was no other church within easy reach, divine worship could not—with safety—be neglected altogether, and the aversion with which he was regarded did not prove invincible. It was the interest of the respectable church-people to get over it, and they had got over it; pleading in extenuation of their indulgence that, in the first place, the rector was a fixture, and, in the second, that his want of social tact was his misfortune rather than his fault, and a clergyman might have even worse defects than that. Lady Latimer, Admiral Parkins, Mr Musgrave, and Miss Wort had supported him in his office from the first, and now Mr Phipps and Mr Carnegie did not systematically absent themselves from his religious ministrations.

The programme of the service, so to speak, was also considerably enlarged since Bessie

Fairfax went away. There was a nice-looking curate whom she recollected as one of the rector's private pupils—Mr Duffer. There were twelve men and boys in white raiment, and Miss Buff presiding at the new organ with more than her ancient courage, executed ambitious music that caused strangers and visitors to look up at the loft, and inquire who the organist was. Player and singers were not always agreed, but no one could say otherwise than that, for a country church, the performance was truly remarkable ; and in the *Hampton Chronicle*, when an account was given of special services, gratifying mention was invariably made of Miss Buff as having presided at the organ with her usual ability. Bessie hardly knew whether to laugh or cry as she listened. Lady Latimer wore a countenance of ineffable patience. She had fought the ground inch by inch with the choral party in the congregation, and inch by inch had lost it. The responses went first, then the psalms,

and this prolonged the service so seriously that twice she walked out of the church during the pause before sermon ; but being pastorally condoled with on the infirmities inseparable from years which prevented her sitting through the discourse, she warmly denied the existence of any such infirmities, and the following Sunday she stayed to the end. For the latest innovation Beechhurst was indebted to the young curate, who had a round full voice. He would intone the prayers. By this time my lady was tired of clerical vanities, and only remarked, with a little disdain in her voice, that Mr Duffer's proper place was Whitchester Cathedral.

When service was over Bessie whispered to her hostess the engagement she had made for herself during the rest of the day. My lady gloomed for an instant, and then assented—but Bessie ought to have asked her leave. The two elder boys were waiting at the church-door as Bessie came out, and snatched

each a daintily gloved hand to conduct her home.

“Mother has gone on first to warn father,” Jack announced ; and missing other friends—the Musgraves, Mittens, and Semples, to wit—she allowed herself to be led in triumph across the road, and up the garden walk—the garden gay as ever with late blooming roses, and as fragrant of mignonette.

When she reached the porch she was all trembling,—there was her mother, rather flushed with her bonnet-strings untied ; and her father appearing from the dining-parlour where the table was spread for the family dinner, just as of old.

“This is as it should be—and how are you, my dear ?” said Mr Carnegie, drawing her affectionately to him.

“Is there any need to ask, Thomas ! Could she have looked bonnier if she had never left us ?” said his wife fondly.

Blushing, beaming, laughing, Bessie came

in,—how small the house seemed, and how full! There was young Christie's picture of her, smiling above the mantelpiece, there was the doctor's old bureau and the old leather chair. Bridget and the younger branches appeared, some of them shy of Bessie, and Totty particularly, who was the baby when she went away. They crowded the stairs, the narrow hall. "Make room there," cried Jack, imperative amidst the fuss; and her mother conveyed the trembling girl up to her own dear old triangular nest under the thatch. The books, the watery miniatures, the oriental bowl and dishes were all in their places. "O mother! how happy it is to see it again!" cried she. And they had a few tears to wink away, and with them the fancied forgetfulnesses of the absent years.

It was a noisy dinner in comparison with the serene dulness Bessie was used to, but not noisier than it was entitled to be with seven children at table, ranging from four to four-

teen—for Sunday was the one day of the week when Mr Carnegie dined with his children, and it was his good pleasure to dine with them all. So many bright faces and white pinafores were a sweet spectacle to Bessie, who was so merry that Totty was quite tamed by the time the dessert of ripe fruit came; and would sit on “Sissy’s” lap, and apply juicy grapes to “Sissy’s” lips—then as “Sissy” opened them, suddenly popped the purple globes into her own little mouth, which made everybody laugh, and was evidently a good old family joke.

Dinner over, Mr Carnegie adjourned to his study, where his practice was to make up for short and often disturbed nights by an innocent nap on Sunday afternoon. “We will go into the drawing-room, Bessie, as we always do—Totty says a hymn with the others now, and will soon begin to say her catechism, God bless her!” Thus Mrs Carnegie.

Bessie had now a boy clinging to either arm.

They put her down in a corner of the sofa, their mother occupying the other, and Totty throned between them. There was a little desultory talk and seeking of places, and then the four elder children, standing round the table read a chapter, verse for verse. Then followed the recitation of the catechism in that queer, mechanical gabble that Bessie recollected so well: "If you stop to think you are sure to break down," was still the warning. After that Jack said the collect and epistle for the day, and Willy and Tom said the gospel, and the lesser ones said psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; and by the time this duty was accomplished Bridget had done dinner, and arrived in holiday gown and ribbons to resume her charge. In a few minutes Bessie was left alone with her mother. The boys went to consult a favourite pear-tree in the orchard, and as Jack was seen an hour or two later perched aloft amongst its gnarled branches with a book, it is probable that he chose that

retreat to pursue undisturbed his sea-faring studies by means of Marryat's novels.

"I like to keep up old-fashioned customs, Bessie," said her mother. "I know the dear children have been taught their duty, and if they forget it sometimes, there is always a hope they may return. Mrs Wiley and Lady Latimer have asked for them to attend the Bible classes, but their father was strongly against it, and I think with him, that if they are not quite so cleverly taught at home, there is a feeling in having learnt at their mother's knees which will stay by them longer. It is growing quite common for young ladies in Beechhurst to have classes in the evening for servant girls and others, but I cannot say I favour them—the girls get together gossiping and stopping out late, and the teachers are so set up with notions of superior piety that they are quite spoilt. And they do break out in the ugliest hats and clothes—faster than the gayest of the young ladies who don't pretend

to be so over righteous. You have not fallen into that way, dear Bessie?"

"Oh no! I do not even teach in the Sunday School at Kirkham. It is very small. Mr Forbes does not encourage the attendance of children whose parents are able to instruct them themselves."

"I am glad to hear it. I do not approve of this system of relieving parents of their private duties—Mr Wiley carries it to excess, and will not permit any poor woman to become a member of the coal and clothing club who does not send her children to Sunday School—the doctor has refused his subscription in consequence, and divides it amongst the recusants. For a specimen of Miss Myra Robb's evening class teaching, we have a girl who provokes Bridget almost past her patience—she cannot say her duty to her neighbour in the catechism, and her practice of it is so imperfect that your father begs me, the next time I engage a scullery-wench, to ascertain

that she is not infected with the offensive pious conceit that distinguishes poor Eliza. Our own dear children are affectionate, and good, on the whole. Jack has made up his mind to the sea, and Willy professes that he will be a doctor, like his father—he could not be better. They are both at Hampton School yet, but we have them over for Sunday while the summer weather continues.”

When Bessie had heard the family news, and all about the children, she had to tell her own, and very interesting her mother found it. She had to answer numerous questions concerning Mr Laurence Fairfax, his wife and boys, and then Mrs Carnegie inquired about that fine gentleman of whose pretensions to Miss Fairfax Lady Latimer had warned her. Bessie blushed rather warmly, and told what facts there were to tell, and she now learnt for the first time that her wooing was a matter of arrangement and policy. The information was not gratifying—to judge

from the hot fire of her face, and the tone of her rejoinder.

“Mr Cecil Burleigh is a fascinating person—so I am assured—but I don’t think I was the least bit in love,” she averred with energetic scorn. Her mother smiled, and did not say so much in reply as Bessie thought she might.

Presently they went into the orchard, and insensibly the subject was renewed. Bessie remembered afterwards saying many things that she never meant to say. She mentioned how she had first seen Mr Cecil Burleigh at the Fairfield wedding devoted to a most lovely young lady whom she had seen again at Ryde, and had known as Miss Julia Gardiner. “I thought they were engaged,” she said. “I am sure they were lovers for a long while.”

“You were under that impression throughout?” Mrs Carnegie suggested interrogatively.

“Yes. From the day I saw them together

at Ryde I had no other thought. He was grandpapa's friend—grandpapa forwarded his election for Norminster, and as I was the young lady of the house at Abbotsmead, it was not singular that he should be kind and attentive to me, was it? I am quite certain that he was as little in love with me as I was with him, though he did invite me to be his wife. I felt very much insulted that he should suppose me such a child as not to know that he did not care for me—it was not in that way he had courted Miss Julia Gardiner."

"It is a much commoner thing than you imagine for a man to be unable to marry as his heart would dictate. But he is not for that to remain single all his life, is he?" said Mrs Carnegie.

"Perhaps not—I should respect him more if he did. I will remain single all my life unless I find somebody to love me first and best," said Bessie with the airy assurance of the romantic age.

"Well, dear, and I trust you may; for affection is the great sweetener of life, and it must be hard getting along without it—but here is father."

Mr Carnegie, his nap over, had seen his wife and Bessie from the study-window. He drew Bessie's hand through his arm, and asked what they were so earnest in debate upon. Not receiving an immediate answer, he went on to remark to his wife that their little Bessie was not spoilt: "For anything I can see, she is our dear Bessie still."

"So she is, Thomas—self-will and her own opinion and all," replied her mother looking fondly in her face.

Bessie laughed and blushed. "You never expected perfection in me, nor too much docility," she said.

The doctor patted her hand, and told her she was good enough for human nature's daily companionship. Then he began to give her

news of their neighbours. "It falls out fortunately that it is holiday-time. Young Christie is here—you know him? He told us how he had met you at some grand house in the winter, where he went to paint a picture—the lady had too little expression to please him, and he was not satisfied with his work. She was, fortunately, and her husband too; for he had a hundred pounds for the picture—like coining money, his father says. He is very good to the old people, and makes them share his prosperity—a most excellent son." Bessie listened for another name of an excellent son. It came. "And Harry Musgrave is at Brook for a whiff of country air. That young man works and plays very hard—he must take heed not to overdo it."

"Then I shall see all my friends while I am in the Forest," said Bessie very glad.

"Yes, and as pleased they will be to see you. Mother, Bessie might walk to Brook with me

before tea. They will be uncommonly gratified, and she will get over to us many another day," Mr Carnegie proposed.

"Yes, Thomas, if it will not overtire her."

"Oh, nothing overtires me!" said Bessie. "Let us go by Great Ashford."

Before they started the doctor had a word or two with his wife alone. He wanted to hear what she had made out from dear Bessie herself respecting that grand gentleman, the member of parliament, who, by Lady Latimer's account, was her suitor sometime ago and still.

"I am puzzled, Thomas, and that is the truth—girls are so deep," Mrs Carnegie said.

"Too deep sometimes for their own comprehension—eh? At any rate, she is not moping and pining. She is as fresh as a rose, and her health and spirits are all right. I don't remember when I have felt so thankful as at the sight of her bonny face to-day."

CHAPTER V.

SUNDAY EVENING AT BROOK.

THAT still Sunday afternoon across the glowing heath to Great Ashford was most enchanting. Every step of the way was a pleasure to Bessie. And when they came to the ford whom should they see resting under the shade of the trees but Harry Musgrave and young Christie. Harry's attitude was somewhat weary. He leant on one elbow, recumbent upon the turf, and with flat pebbles dexterously thrown made ducks and drakes upon the surface of the shallow pool where the cattle drank. Young Christie was talking with much earnestness—propounding some argument apparently—and neither observed the approach of Mr Carnegie and his companion until they were within twenty paces. Then a sudden flush overspread

Harry's face. "It is Bessie Fairfax!" said he, and sprang to his feet, and advanced to meet her. Bessie was rosy too, and her eyes dewy bright. Young Christie, viewing her as an artist, called her to himself the sweetest and most womanly of women, and admired her the more for her kind looks at his friend. Harry's *ennui* was quite routed.

"We were walking to Brook—your mother will give us a cup of tea, Harry?" said Mr Carnegie.

Harry was walking home to Brook too, with Christie for company—his mother would be only too proud to entertain so many good friends. They went along by the rippling water together, and entered the familiar garden by the wicket into the wood. Mr and Mrs Musgrave were out there on the green slope under the beeches, awaiting their son and his friend, and lively were their exclamations of joy when they saw who their other visitors were.

“Did I not tell you little Bessie was at church, Harry?” cried his father turning to him with an air of triumph.

“And he would not believe it. I thought myself it must be a mistake,” said Mrs Musgrave.

Bessie was touched to the heart by their cordial welcome. She made a most favourable impression. Mr Musgrave thought her as handsome a young lady as a man could wish to look at; and his wife said her good heart could be seen in her face.

Bessie felt, nevertheless, rather more formally at home than in her childhood, except with her old comrade, Harry. Between them there was not a moment's shyness. They were as friendly, as intimate as formerly, though with a perceptible difference of manner. Bessie had the simple graces of happy maidenhood, and Harry had the courteous reserve of good society to which his university honours and pleasant humour had introduced him. He was

a very acceptable companion wherever he went, because his enjoyment of life was so thorough as to be almost infectious. He must be a dull dog, indeed, who did not cheer up in the sunshine of Musgrave's presence—that was his popular character, and it agreed with Bessie's reminiscences of him; but Harry, like other young men of great hopes and small fortunes, had his hours of shadow, that Christie knew of, and others guessed at. At tea the talk fell on London amusements and bachelor-life in chambers.

“As for Christie, prudent old foggy that he is, what can he know of our miseries?” said Harry with assumed ruefulness. “He has a mansion in Cheyne Walk and a balcony looking over the river, and a vigilant housekeeper who allows no latchkey, and turns off the gas at eleven. She gives him perfect little dinners, and makes him too comfortable by half—we poor apprentices to law lodge and fare very rudely.”

"He has the air of being well done to, which is more than could be said for you when first you arrived at home, Harry," remarked his mother with what struck Bessie as a long and wistful gaze.

"Too much smell of the midnight oil is poison to country lungs—mind what I tell you," said the doctor emphasizing his words with a grave nod at the young man.

"He ought to be content with less of his theatres and his operas and supper-parties if he will read and write so furiously. A young fellow can't combine the lives of a man of study and a man of leisure without stealing too many hours from his natural rest. But I talk in vain—talk you, Mr Carnegie," said Christie with earnestness.

"A man must work, and work hard, now-a-days if he means to do or be anything," said Harry defiantly.

"It is the pace that kills," said the doctor.
"The mischief is that you ardent young fellows

never know when to stop. And in public life, my lad, there is many a one comes to acknowledge that he has made more haste than good speed."

Harry sank back in his chair with laughing resignation—it was too bad, he said, to talk of him to his face so dismally. Bessie Fairfax was looking at him, her eyebrows raised, and fancying she saw a change—he was certainly not so brown as he used to be, nor so buoyant, nor so animated. But it would have perplexed her to define what the change she fancied was. Conscious of her observation Harry dissembled a minute, then pushed back his chair, and invited her to come away to the old sitting-room where the evening sun shone. No one offered to follow them; they were permitted to go alone.

The sitting-room looked a trifle more dilapidated, but was otherwise unaltered—and was Harry's own room still by the books, pens, ink and paper on the table. Being by them-

selves silence ensued. Bessie sadly wondered whether anything was really going wrong with her beloved Harry, and he knew that she was wondering. Then she remembered what young Christie had said at Castlemount of his being occasionally short of money, and would have liked to ask. But when she had reflected a moment she did not dare. Their boy-and-girl days—their days of plain out-spoken confidence, were for ever past. That one year of absence spent by him in London, by her at Abbotsmead, had insensibly matured the worldly knowledge of both, and without a word spoken each recognised the other's position. But without diminution of their ancient kindness.

This recognition, and certain possible, even probable, results had been anticipated before Bessie was suffered to come into the Forest. Lady Angleby had said to Mr Fairfax : "Entrust her to Lady Latimer for a short while. Granting her humble friends all the virtues

that humanity adorns itself with, they must want some of the social graces. Those people always dispense more or less with politeness in their familiar intercourse. Now Cecil is exquisitely polite, and Miss Fairfax has a fine, delicate feeling. She cannot but make comparisons, and draw conclusions. Solid worth apart, the charm of manner is with us. I shall expect decisive consequences from this visit."

What Bessie actually discerned was that all the old tenderness that had blessed her childhood, and that gives the true sensitive touch, was still abiding—father, mother, Harry,—dearest of all who were most dear to her,—had not lost one whit of it. And judged by the eye, where love looked out, Harry's great frame, well knit and supplied by athletic sports, had a dignity, and his irregular features a beauty, that pleased her better than dainty, high-bred elegance. He had to push his way over the obstacles of poverty and obscure

birth, and she was a young lady of family and fortune, but she looked up to him with as meek a humility as ever she had done when they were friends and comrades together, before her vicissitudes began, and her exalted kinsfolk reclaimed her. Woldshire had not acquainted her with his equal. All the world never would !

Their conversation was opened at last with a surprised smile at finding themselves where they were—in the bare sitting room at Brook, with the western light shining on them through the vine-trellised lattices after four years of growth and experience. How often had Bessie made a picture in her day-dreams of their next meeting here since she went away ! In this hour, in this instant, love was new-born in both their hearts. They saw it, each in the other's eyes ; heard it, each in the other's voice. Tears came with Bessie's sudden smile. She trembled, and sighed and laughed, and said she did not know why she was so

foolish. Harry was foolish too as he made her some indistinct plea about being so glad. And a red spot burned on his own cheek as he dwelt on her loveliness. Once more they were silent, then both at once began to talk of people and things indifferent, coming gradually round to what concerned themselves.

Harry Musgrave spoke of his friend Christie and his profession relatively to his own. "Christie has distinguished himself already. There are houses in London where the hostess has a pride in bringing forward young talent. Christie got the *entrée* of one of the best at the beginning of his career, and is quite a favourite. His gentleness is better than conventional polish, but he has taken that well too. He is a generous little fellow, and deserves the good luck that has befallen him. His honours are budding betimes. That is the joy of an artistic life—you work but it is amongst flowers. Christie will be famous before he is thirty, and he is easy in his circumstances now

—he will never be more—never rich—he is too open-handed for that. But I shall have years and years to toil and wait”—Harry concluded with a melancholy, humorous fall in his voice, half mocking at himself and half pathetic, and the same was his countenance.

All the more earnestly did Bessie brighten. “You knew that, Harry, when you chose the law. But if you work amongst bookworms and cobwebs, don’t you play in the sunshine?”

“Now and then, Bessie—but there will be less and less of that if I maintain my high endeavours.”

“You will, Harry, you must! You will never be satisfied else. But there is no sentiment in the law—it is dreary, dreary.”

“No sentiment in the law? It is a laborious calling, but many honourable men follow it,—and are not the lawyers continually helping those to right who suffer wrong?”

“That is not the vulgar idea of them, is it? But I believe it is what you will always strive

to do, Harry." Bessie spoke with pretty eagerness. She feared that she might have seemed to condemn Harry's vocation, and she hastened to make amends. Harry understood her perfectly, and had the impudence to laugh at her quite in his old boyish way. A little confused—also in the old way—she ran on. "I have seen the judges in their scarlet robes and huge white wigs on a hot July Sunday attending service in Norminster Cathedral, I tried to attire you so, but my imagination failed. I don't believe you will ever be a judge, Harry."

"That is a discouraging prediction, Bessie, if I am to be a lawyer. I do a little in this way," he said, handling a famous review that lay on the table. "May I send it to you when there is a paper of mine in it?"

"Oh yes, I should like it so much! I should be so interested," said Bessie fervently.

"We take the *Times* at Abbotsmead, and *Blackwood* and the old *Quarterly*, but not

that. I have seen it at my Uncle Laurence's house, and Lady Latimer has it. I saw it in the Fairfield drawing-room last night—is there anything of yours here, Harry ?”

“Yes, this is mine—a rather dry nut for you. But occasionally I contribute a light literature article.”

“Oh, I must tell my lady ! She and Mr Logger were differing over that very paper, and ascribing it to half a dozen great wise people in turn.”

Harry laughed. “Pray, then, don't confess for me. The arguments will lose half their force if she learn what a tyro wrote it.”

“No, no, she will be delighted to know—she adores talent. Besides, Mr Logger told her that the cleverest articles were written by sprightly young men fresh from college.—Have you paid your respects to her yet ? She told me with a significant little *moue* that you had condescended to call upon her at Easter.”

“I propose to pay my respects in company

with Christie to-morrow. She is a grand old lady—and what cubs we were, Bessie, to throw her kindness in her face before. How angry you were !”

“ You were afraid that her patronage might be a trespass on your independence. It was a mistake in the right direction—if it was a mistake at all. Poor Mr Logger is called a toady because he loves to visit at the comfortable houses of rich great widow ladies—but I am sure they love to have him. Lady Latimer does not approve you any the less for not being eager to accept her invitations. You know I was fond of her—I looked up to her more than anybody. I believe I do still.”

There was a brief pause, and then Harry said : “ I have heard nothing of Abbotsmead yet, Bessie ? ”

“ There is not much to hear. I live there, but no longer in the character of heiress—that prospect is changed by the opportune discovery that my Uncle Laurence had the wisdom, some

five years ago, to take a wife to please himself, instead of a second fine lady to please my grandfather. He made a secret of it, for which there was no necessity and not much excuse, but he did it for their happiness. They have three capital little boys who, of course, have taken my shoes. I am not sorry. I don't care for Woldshire or Abbotsmead. The Forest has my heart."

"And mine! A man may set his hopes high—so I go on aspiring to the possession of this earthly paradise of Brook."

Bessie was smitten with a sudden recollection of what more Harry had aspired to, that time she was admitted into his confidence respecting the old manor-house. She coloured consciously; for she knew that he also recollected, then said with a smile: "Ah, Harry, but between such aspirations and their achievement there stretches so often a weary long day. You will tire with looking forward if you look so far. Are you not tiring now!"

"No—no. You must not take any notice of my mother's solemn prognostics. She does not admire what she calls the smoky colour I bring home from London. Some remote ancestor of my father died there of decline, and she has taken up a notion that I ought to throw the study of the law to the winds, come home and turn farmer. Of what avail, I ask her, would my scholarship be then?"

"You would enjoy it, Harry. In combination with a country life it would make you the pleasantest life that is."

Harry shook his head. "What do you know about it, Bessie? It is dreadfully hard on an ambitious fellow to be forced to turn his back on all his fine visions of usefulness and distinction for the paltry fear that death may cut him short."

"Oh, if you regard it in that light! I should not call it a paltry fear. There are more ways than one to distinction—this for instance," dropping her hand on Harry's paper in the

review. "Winged words fly far, and influence you never know what minds. I should be proud of the distinction of a public writer."

"Literature by itself is not enough to depend on unless one draws a great prize of popularity. I have not imagination enough to write a novel. Have you forgotten the disasters of your heroes, the poets, Bessie? No—I cannot give up after a year of difficulty. I would rather rub out than rust out, if that be all."

"O Harry, don't be provoking! why rub out or rust out either?" remonstrated Bessie. "Your mother would rather keep her living son though ever so unlucky than bury the most promising that ever killed himself with misdirected labour. Two young men came to Abbotsmead once to bid grandpapa good-bye—they were only nineteen and sixteen, and were the last survivors of a family of seven sons. They were going to New Zealand to save their lives, and are thriving there in a

patriarchal fashion with large families and flocks and herds. You are not asked to go to New Zealand, but you had better do that than die untimely in foggy England, dear as it is. Is not life sweet to you?—it is very sweet to me.”

Harry got up, and walked to an open lattice that commanded the purple splendour of the western sky. He stood there two or three minutes quite silent, then, by a glance invited Bessie to come. “Life is so sweet,” he said, “that I dare not risk marring it by what seems like cowardice—but I will be prudent—if only for the sake of the women who love me.” There was the old mirthful light in Harry’s eyes as he said the last words very softly.

“Don’t make fun of us,” said Bessie looking up with a faint blush. “You know we love you—mind you keep your word—It is time I was going back to Fairfield—the evening is closing in.”

The door opened, and Mrs Musgrave entered. "Well, children, are you ready?" she inquired cheerfully. "We are all thinking you have had quite time enough to tell your secrets, and the doctor has been wanting to leave for ever so long."

"Bessie has been administering a lecture, mother, and giving me some serious advice—she would send me to the antipodes," said her son. Bessie made a gentle show of denial, and they came forward from the window.

"Never mind him, dear, that is his teasing way—I know how much to believe of his nonsense," said Mrs Musgrave. "But," she added more gravely, turning to Harry, "if Bessie agrees with your mother that there is no sense in destroying your health by poring over dusty law in London when there are wholesome light ways of living to be turned to in sweet country air, Bessie is wise. I wish anybody could persuade him to tell what is his objection to

the Church. Or he might go and be a tutor in some high family, as Lady Latimer suggested. He is well fitted for it."

"Did Lady Latimer suggest that, mother?" Harry asked with sharp annoyance in his voice and look.

"She did, Harry—and don't let that vex you as if it was a coming-down. For she said that many such tutors, when they took orders, got good promotion, and more than one had been made a bishop."

This was too much for the gravity of the young people. "A bishop, Bessie! Can you array me in lawn sleeves and satin gown?" cried Harry with a peal of laughter. Then with a sudden recovery and a sigh, he said: "Nay, mother, if I must play a part it shall not be on that stage. I'll keep my self-respect whatever else I forfeit."

"You will have your own way, Harry, lead where it will—your father and me have not that to learn at this time of day. But, Bessie

joy, Mr Carnegie's in a hurry, and it is a good step to Fairfield. We shall see you often while you are in the Forest, I hope?"

"Staying with Lady Latimer is not quite the same as being at home, but I shall try to come again."

"Do, dear—we shall be more than pleased; you were ever a favourite at Brook," said Mrs Musgrave tenderly. Bessie kissed Harry's mother, shook hands with himself and his father, who also patted her on the back as a reminder of old familiarity, and then went off with Mr Carnegie, light-hearted and light-footed, a picture of young content. The doctor, after one glance at her blithe face, thought that he could tell his wife when he got home who it was their little Bessie really loved.

Harry Musgrave took his hat to set Christie part of the way back to Beechhurst in the opposite direction. The young men talked as they walked, Christie resuming the argument

that the apparition of Bessie Fairfax had interrupted in the afternoon. The argument was that Mrs Musgrave had enunciated against the study of the law. Harry was not much moved by it. If he had a new motive for prudence, he had also a new and very strong motive for persistence. Christie suspected as much, but the name of Miss Fairfax was not mentioned.

"You have made your mark in that review, and literature is as fair a profession as art, if a man will be only industrious," he said.

"I hate the notion of task-work and drudgery in literature, and what sort of a living is to be got out of our inspirations," objected Harry.

"It is good to bear the yoke in our youth—I find it discipline to paint pot-boilers," rejoined little Christie mildly. "You must write pot-boilers for the magazines. The best authors do it."

"It is not easy to get a footing in a magazine where one would care to appear. There

are not many authors whose sole dependence is a goose-quill. Call over the well-known men—they are all something else before they are authors. Your pot-boilers are sure of a market—pictures have become articles of furniture, indispensable to people of taste, and everybody has a taste now-a-days. But rejected papers are good for nothing but to light one's fire—if one can keep a fire. Look at Stamford—Stamford has done excellent work for thirty years, he has been neither idle nor thriftless, and he lives from hand to mouth still. He is one of the writers for bread who must take the price he can get, and not refuse it, lest he get nothing. And that would be my case—is my case—for, as you know, my pen provides two-thirds of my maintenance. I cannot tax my father further. If I had not missed that fellowship! The love of money may be a root of evil, but the want of it is an evil grown up and bearing fruit that sets the teeth on edge!"

"My dear Musgrave, that is the voice of despair—and for such a universal *crux*!"

"I don't despair, but I am tried, partly by my hard lines and partly by the anxieties at home that infect me. To think that with this frame," striking out his muscular right arm, "even Carnegie warns me as if I were a sick girl! The sins of the fathers are the modern Nessus' shirt to their children! I shall do my utmost to hold on until I get my call to the bar, and a platform to start from. If I cannot hold on so long, I'll call it, as my mother does, defeat by visitation of God, and step down and be a poor fellow amongst other poor fellows. But that is not the life I planned for."

"We all know that, Musgrave, and there is no quarter where you won't meet the truest sympathy. Many a man has to come down from the tall pedestal where his hopes have set him, and unless it be by his own grievous fault, he is tolerably sure to find his level of

content on the common ground. That's where I mean to walk with my Janey ; and some day you'll hold up a finger, and just as sweet a companion will come, and walk hand in hand with you."

Harry smiled despite his trouble—he knew what Christie meant, and he believed him. He parted with his friend there, and turned back in the soft gloom towards home, thinking of her all the way—dear little Bessie, so frank and warm-hearted. He remembered how, when he was a boy, and lost a certain prize at school that he had reckoned on too confidently, she had whispered away his shame-faced disappointment with a rosy cheek against his jacket, and: "Never mind, Harry ; I love you." And she would do it again, he knew she would. The feeling was in her—she could not hide it.

But at this point of his meditations his worldly wisdom came in to dash their beauty. Unless he could bridge with bow of highest promise the gulf that vicissitude had opened

between them since those days of primitive affection, he need not set his mind upon her. He ought not—so he told himself—though his mind was set upon her already beyond the chance of turning. He did not know yet that he had a rival—when that knowledge came all other obstacles—sentimental, chivalrous,—would be swallowed up in its portentous shadow. For to-night he held his reverie in peace.

CHAPTER VI.

AT FAIRFIELD.

"WE thought you were lost," was Lady Latimer's greeting to Bessie Fairfax when she entered the Fairfield drawing-room, tired with her long walk, but still in buoyant spirits.

"Oh no!" said Bessie. "I have come from Brook. When I had seen them all at home my father carried me off there to tea."

"I observed that you were not at the evening service. The Musgraves and those people drink tea at five o'clock—you must be ready for your supper now. Mr Logger, will you be so good as to ring the bell?"

Bessie was profoundly absorbed in her own happiness, but Lady Latimer's manner, and still more the tone of her voice, struck her with an uncomfortable chill. "Thank you,

but I do not wish for anything to eat," she said a little surprised.

The bell had been rung, however, and the footman appeared. "Miss Fairfax will take supper—she dined in the middle of the day," said Lady Latimer—but nothing could be less hospitable than the inflection of her speech as she gave the order.

"Indeed, indeed, I am not hungry—we had chicken and tongue to tea," cried Bessie, rather shame-faced now.

"And matrimony-cake and hot buttered toast"——

"No—we had no matrimony-cake," said Bessie, who understood now that my lady was cross—and no one could be more taunting and unpleasant than my lady when she was cross.

The footman had taken Miss Fairfax's remonstrative statement for a negative, and had returned to his own supper when the drawing-room bell rang again. "Why do you not

announce Miss Fairfax's supper? Is it not ready yet?"

"In a minute, my lady!" said the man and vanished. In due time, he reappeared to say that supper was served, and Lady Latimer looked at her young guest, and repeated the notice. Bessie laughed, and rising with a fine colour and rather proud air, left the room and went straight to bed. When neither she nor Mrs Betts came in to prayers half an hour later my lady became silent and reflective—she was not accustomed to revolt amongst her young ladies, and Miss Fairfax's quiet defiance took her at a disadvantage. She had anticipated a much more timid habit in this young lady whom she had undertaken to manage, and mould to the will of her grandfather. In the morning her humour was gracious again, and Bessie who had received counsel from Dora Meadows, deeply experienced in Aunt Olympia's peculiarities, made no sign of remembering

that there had been any fray. But she was warned of the imperious temper of her hostess who would have no independence of action amongst her youthful charges, but expected them to consult her and defer to her at every step. "Why then," thought Bessie, "did she bid me, in the first instance, do exactly what I liked?" To this there was no answer—is there ever an answer to the *why* of an exacting woman's caprice?

After breakfast the young ladies took Mr Logger out for a salubrious airing across the heath. In their absence Harry Musgrave and young Christie called at Fairfield, and no longer in terror of Lady Latimer's patronage, talked to her of themselves, which she liked. She was exceedingly kind, and asked them both to dine the next day. "You will meet Mr Cecil Burleigh—you may have heard his name, Mr Musgrave? The Conservative member for Norminster," she said rather imposingly.

"Oh yes, he is one of the coming men."

said Harry much interested, and he accepted the invitation. Mr Christie declined it. His mother was very ill, he said ; but he would send his portfolio for her ladyship to look over if she would allow him. Her ladyship would be delighted.

When the young ladies brought Mr Logger back to luncheon the visitors were gone, but Lady Latimer mentioned that they had been there, and she gave Mr Logger a short account of them. "Mr Harry Musgrave is reading for the bar. He took honours at Oxford, and if his constitution will stand the wear and tear of a laborious, intellectual life, great things may be expected from him. But unhappily he is not very strong." Mr Logger shook his head, and said it was the London gas. "Mr Christie is a son of our village wheelwright, himself a most ingenious person. Mr Danberry found him out, and spoke those few words of judicious praise that revealed the young man to himself as an artist. Mr Danberry was staying with

me at the time, and we had him here with his sketches, which were so promising that we encouraged him to make art his study. And he has done so with much credit."

"Christie? a landscape painter? does a portrait now and then? I have met him at Danberry's," said Mr Logger, whose vocation it was to have met everybody who was likely to be mentioned in society. "Curious now—Archdeacon Topham was the son of a country carpenter—headstrong fellow—took a mountain walk without a guide, and fell down a *crévasse*, or something."

Mr Cecil Burleigh arrived the next day to luncheon. In the afternoon the whole party walked in the Forest. Lady Latimer kept Dora at her elbow, and required Mr Logger's opinion and advice on a new emigration scheme that she was endeavouring to develop. Bessie Fairfax was thus left to Mr Cecil Burleigh, and they were not at a loss for conversation. Bessie

was feeling quite gay and happy, and talked and listened as cheerfully as possible. The gentleman was rather jaded with the work of the session, and showed it in his handsome visage. He assumed that Miss Fairfax was so far in his confidence as to be interested in the high themes that interested himself, and of these he discoursed, until his companion inadvertently betrayed that she was capable of abstracting her mind and thinking of something else while seeming to give him all her polite attention. He was then silent—not unthankfully.

Their walk took them round first by the wheelwright's and afterwards by the village. Lady Latimer loved to entertain and occupy her guests—even those who would have preferred wider margins of leisure. On the green in front of the wheelwright's, they found little Christie seated under a white umbrella, making a sketch of his father's

house and the shed. A group of sturdy children had put themselves just in the way by a disabled waggon to give it life.

"I am doing it to please my mother," said the artist in reply to Lady Latimer's inquiry if he was going to make a finished picture of it. He went on with his dainty touches without moving. "I must not lose the five o'clock effect of the sun through that tall fir," he explained apologetically.

"No; continue, pray, continue," said my lady, and summoned her party to proceed.

At the entrance of the village, to Bessie's great joy they fell in with Mr Carnegie returning from a long round on horseback.

"Would Bessie like a ride with the old doctor to-morrow?" he asked her as the others strolled on.

"Oh yes—I have brought my habit," she said enthusiastically.

"Then Miss Hoyden shall trot along with

me, and we'll call for you—not later than ten, Bessie, and you'll not keep me waiting."

"Oh no! I will be ready. Lady Latimer has not planned anything for the morning, so I may be excused."

Whether Lady Latimer had planned anything for the morning or not, she manifested a lofty displeasure that Miss Fairfax had planned this ride for herself. Dora whispered to her not to mind, it would soon blow over. So Bessie went upstairs to dress somewhat relieved, but still with a doubtful mind, and a sense of indignant astonishment at my lady's behaviour to her. She thought it very odd, and speculated whether there might be any reason for it beyond the failure in deference to herself.

An idea struck her when she saw Mrs Betts unfolding her most sumptuous dress—a rich white silk embroidered in black and silver for mourning—evidently in the intention of

adorning her to the highest. "Oh, not that dress!" she said. "I will wear my India muslin with black ribbons."

"It is quite a set party, Miss," remonstrated Mrs Betts.

"No matter," said Bessie decisively—No! She would not triumph over dear Harry with grand clothes!

When her young lady had spoken, Mrs Betts knew that it was spending her breath in vain to contradict; and Bessie went down to the drawing-room with an air of inexpensive simplicity, very becoming to her beauty, and that need not alarm a poor gentleman who might have visions of her as a wife. Lady Latimer instantly accused and convicted her of that intention in it—in her private thoughts that is. My lady herself was magnificent in purple satin, and little Dora Meadows had put on her finest raiment; but Bessie, with her wealth of fair hair and incomparable beauty of colouring, still glowed the

most—and she glowed with more than her natural rose when Lady Latimer, after looking her up and down from head to foot with extreme deliberation, turned away with a scornful face. Bessie's eyes sparkled, and Mr Logger, who saw all and saw nothing, perceived that she could look scornful too.

Mr Cecil Burleigh was pacing to and fro the conservatory into which a glass door opened from the drawing-room. His hands were clasped behind him, and his head was bent down as if he were in a profoundly cogitative mood. "I am afraid Burleigh is rather out of sorts—the effect of overstrain—the curse of our time," said Mr Logger sententiously. Mr Logger himself was admirably preserved.

"He is looking remarkably well on the contrary," said Lady Latimer. My lady was certainly not in her most beneficent humour. Dora darted an alarmed glance at Bessie, and at that moment Mr Musgrave was announced.

Bessie blushed him a sweet welcome, and

said, perhaps unnecessarily, "I am so glad you have come," and Harry expressed his thanks with kind eyes, and a very cordial shake of the hand—they appeared quite confidentially intimate, those young people. Lady Latimer stood looking on like a picture of dignity, and when Mr Cecil Burleigh entered from the conservatory, she introduced the two young men in her stateliest manner. Bessie was beginning now to understand what all this meant. Throughout the dinner my lady never relaxed. She was formally courteous, elaborately gracious, but *grande dame* from her shoe-tie to the top-knot of her cap.

Those who knew her well were ill at ease, but Harry Musgrave dined in undisturbed, complacent comfort. He had known dons at Oxford, and placed Lady Latimer in the donnish caste—that was all. He thought she had been a more charming woman. The conversation was interrogatory, and chiefly addressed to himself, and he had plenty to say,

and a pleasant way of saying it, but except for Bessie's dear bright face opposite the atmosphere would have been freezing. When the ladies withdrew Mr Logger almost immediately followed, and then Mr Cecil Burleigh was himself again. He unbent to this athletic young man whose Oxford double-first was the hall-mark of his quality, and whom Miss Fairfax was so frankly glad to see. Harry Musgrave had heard the reputation of the other, and met his condescension with the easy deference of a young man who knows the world. They were mutually interesting, and stayed in the dining-room until Lady Latimer sent to say that tea was in.

When they entered the drawing-room my lady and Mr Logger were deep in a report of the emigration commission. Bessie and Dora were sitting on the steps into the rose-garden, watching the moon rise over the distant sea. Dora was bidden to come in out of the dew, and give the gentlemen a cup of tea ; Bessie

was not bidden to do anything—she was apparently in disgrace. Dora obeyed like a little scared rabbit. Harry Musgrave stood a minute pensive, then took possession of a fine, quilted red silk *duvet* from the couch, and folded it round Bessie's shoulders with the remark that her dress was but thin. Mr Cecil Burleigh witnessed with secret trepidation the simple, affectionate thoughtfulness with which the act was done, and the beautiful look of kindness with which it was acknowledged. Bessie's innocent face was a mirror for her heart. If this fine gentleman was any longer deceived on his own account, he was one of the blind who are blind because they will not see.

Lady Latimer was observant too, and she now left her blue-book, and said : “ Mr Musgrave, will you not have tea ? ”

Harry came forward and accepted a cup, and was kept standing in the middle of the room for the next half hour, extemporising

views and opinions upon subjects on which he had none, until a glance of my lady's eye towards the clock on the chimney-piece gave him notice of the hours observed in great society. A few minutes after he took his leave without having found the opportunity of speaking to Bessie again, except to say, "Good-night."

As Harry Musgrave left the room my lady rang the bell, and when the servant answered it, she turned to Bessie and said in her iced voice: "Perhaps you would like to send for a shawl?"

"Thank you, but I will not go out again," said Bessie mildly; and the servant vanished.

Mr Logger, who had really much amiability, here offered a remark: "A very fine young man, that Mr Musgrave, great power of countenance. Wherever I meet with it now I say, let us cherish talent; for it will soon be the only real distinction where everybody is rich."

Mr Cecil Burleigh made an inarticulate

murmur, which might signify acquiescence or the reverse.

Lady Latimer said : " Young ladies, I think it is time you were going upstairs." And with dutiful alacrity the young ladies went.

"Never mind," whispered Dora to Bessie with a kiss as they separated. "If you take any notice of Aunt Olympia's tempers you will not have a moment's peace—I never do. All will be right again in the morning." Bessie had her doubts of that, but she tried to feel hopeful ; and she was not without her consolation, whether or no.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER RIDE WITH THE DOCTOR.

HALF-PAST nine was the breakfast-hour at Fairfield, and Bessie Fairfax said she would prepare for her ride before going down.

"Will you breakfast in your riding-habit, Miss—her ladyship is very particular," said Mrs Betts in a tone implying that her ladyship might consider it a liberty. Bessie said, yes, she must not keep Mr Carnegie waiting when he came.

So she went downstairs in her habit and a crimson neck-tie, with her hair compactly rolled up, and looking exceedingly well. Lady Latimer justified Dora's predictions—she kissed Bessie as if she had never been affronted. Bessie accepted the caress, and was

thankful. It was no part of her pleasure to vex my lady.

They had not left the breakfast-table when the servant announced that Mr Carnegie had arrived. "We will go out, and see you mount," said Lady Latimer, and left her unfinished meal, Mr Cecil Burleigh attending her. Dora would have gone too, but as Mr Logger made no sign of moving, my lady intimated that she must remain. Lady Latimer had inquiries to make of the doctor respecting several sick poor persons, her pensioners, and while they were talking Mr Cecil Burleigh gave Bessie a hand up into her saddle, and remarked that Miss Hoyden was in high condition and very fresh.

"Oh, I can hold her; she has a good mouth and perfect temper—she never ran away with me but once," said Bessie, caressing her old favourite with voice and hand.

"And what happened on that occasion?" said Mr Cecil Burleigh.

"She had her fling and nothing happened. It was along the road that skirts the Brook pastures, and at the sharp turn Mr Harry Musgrave saw her coming—head down, the bit in her teeth—and threw open the gate, and we dashed into the clover. As I did not lose my nerve or tumble off, I am never afraid now. I love a good gallop."

Mr Cecil Burleigh asked no more questions. If it be true that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh—Brook and Mr Harry Musgrave must have been much in Miss Fairfax's thoughts—this was now the third time that she had found occasion to mention them since coming to breakfast.

Lady Latimer turned indoors again with a pre-occupied air. Bessie had looked behind her as she rode down the avenue as if she were bidding them good-bye. Mr Cecil Burleigh was silent too. He had come to Fairfield with certain lively hopes and expectations, for which my lady was mainly

responsible, and already he was experiencing sensations of blankness, worse to bear than disappointment. Others might be perplexed as to Miss Fairfax's sentiments, but to him they were clear as the day—friendly, but nothing more. She was now where she would be, was exuberantly contented, and could not hide how slight a tie upon her had been established by a year amongst her kindred in Woldshire.

"This is like old times, Bessie," said the doctor as the Fairfield gate closed behind them.

Bessie laughed, and tossed her head like a creature escaped: "Yes! I am so happy," she answered.

The ride was just one of the doctor's regular rounds. He had to call at Brook, where a servant was ill, and they went by the high-road to the manor. Harry Musgrave was not at home. He had gone out for a day's ranging, and was pensively pondering his way through the bosky recesses of the Forest, under

the unbroken silence of the tall pines, to the sea-shore and the old haunts of the almost extinct race of smugglers. The first person they met after leaving the manor was little Christie with a pale radiant face, having just come on a perfect theme for a picture—a still woodland pool reflecting high broken banks and flags and rushes, with slender birchen trees hanging over, and a cluster of low reed-thatched huts, very uncomfortable to live in, but gloriously mossed and weather-stained to paint.

“Don’t linger here too late—it is an unwholesome spot,” said Mr Carnegie warning him as he rode on. Little Christie set up his white umbrella in the sun, and kings might have envied him.

“My mother is better, but call and see her,” he cried after the doctor ; this amendment was one cause of the artist’s blitheness.

“Of course, she is better—she has had nothing for a week to make her bad,” said Mr Carnegie ; but when he reached the wheel-

wright's and saw Mrs Christie, with a handkerchief tied over her cap, gently pacing the narrow garden-walks, he assumed an air of excessive astonishment.

"Yes, Mr Carnegie, sir, I'm up and out," she announced in a tone of no thanks to anybody. "I felt a sing'lar wish to taste the air, and my boy says, 'Go out, mother, it will do you more good than anything.' I could enjoy a ride in a chaise, but folks that make debts can afford to behave very handsome to themselves in a many things that them that pays ready money has'to be mean enough to do without. Jones's wife has her rides, but if her husband would pay for the repair of the spring-cart that was mended fourteen months ago come Martinmas, there'd be more sense in that."

"Don't natter, my good soul! Walking is better than riding any fine day, if you have got the strength," said the doctor briskly.

"Yes, sir—there's that consolation for them

that is not rich, and loves to pay their way. I hope to walk to church next Sunday, please the Lord ! And if a word could be given to Mr Wiley not to play so on the feelings, it would be a mercy. He do make such awful faces, and allude to sudden death and accidents and the like, as is enough to give an ailing person a turn. I said to Mrs Bunny, "Mary," I said, "don't you go to hear him—leastways, sit by the door if you must, and don't stop for the sermon—it might make that impression it would do the babe a mischief."

"Go to chapel ; it is nearer. And take Mrs Bunny with you," said Mr Carnegie.

"No, sir. Mrs Wiley has been very kind in calling and taking notice since I have been laid up, and one good turn deserves another. I shall attend church in future—though the doctrine's so shocking that if folks pondered it the lunatic asylums wouldn't hold 'em all. I'll never believe as the Lord meant us to be threatened with judgment to come, and hell,

and all that, till one's afraid to lie down in one's bed. He'd not have let there be an end of us if we didn't get so mortal tired o' living."

"Living is a weariness that men and women bear with unanimous patience, Mrs Christie—aches and pains included."

"So it may be, sir. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. A week ago I could not have thought the pleasure it would be to-day to see the sun, and the pretty things in flower, and my boy going out with his colour-box. And not as much physic have you given me, Mr Carnegie, as would lie on a penny-piece!"

Bessie Fairfax laughed as they rode on and said: "Nobody changes! I should be tempted to give Mrs Christie something horribly nasty for her ingratitude."

"Nobody changes!" echoed the doctor. "She will be at her drugs again before the month is out."

A little beyond the wheelwright's Mr Car-

negie pulled up at a spot by the wayside where an itinerant tinker sat in the shade with his brazier hot, doing a good stroke of work on the village kettles and pots. "Eh, Gampling, here you are again! They bade me at home look out for you, and tell you to call. There is a whole regiment of cripples to mend."

"Then let 'em march to Hampton, sir—they'll get back sometime this side o' Christmas," said the tinker with a surly cunning glance out of the corner of his eye. "Your women's so mighty hard to please that I'm not meaning to call again, I prefers to work where I gives satisfaction."

"I did hear something of a pan new bot-tomed to mend a hole in its side; but what is that amongst friends? Mistakes will occur in the best regulated businesses."

"You're likely to know, sir; there's a sight o' folks dropping off quite unaccountable else. I'm not dependent on one nor another, and what I says I stands to—I'll never call at

Dr Carnegie's back-door again while that Irish lass is about his kitchen—she's give me the rough side of her tongue once, but she won't do it no more."

"Then good-day to you, Gampling—I can't part with the Irish lass at your price."

A sturdy labourer came along the road eating a hunch of bread and cheese. Mr Carnegie asked him how his wife did. The answer was crabbed: "She's never nought to boast on, and she's allus worse after a spiritchus visit—parson's paying her one now. Can you tell me, Mr Carnegie, sir, why parson chooses folk's dinner-time to drop in an' badger 'em about church? Old parson never did." He did not stay to have his puzzle elucidated, but trudged heavily on.

"Mr Wiley does not seem very popular yet," observed Bessie.

"He is more so than he was. But his wife who helps the poor liberally in the winter is of twice the use in the parish that he is, with his

inopportune 'spiritchus visits.' I have remonstrated with him about going to the cottages between twelve and one, when dinner is being eaten and the men want a bit of rest, but he professes that it is the only time to catch them indoors. I suppose Molton won't bear it, and takes up his food and walks out. Yet Beechhurst might have a worse pastor than poor Wiley. He is a man I pity—a martyr to dyspepsia and a gloomy imagination. But I will not deny that he often raises my choler still." The doctor was on the verge of having it raised now.

At the last bend of the road to the village, and nearly opposite the forge, was a small cabin of one room, the abode of the respectable Mrs Wallop, the mainstay of Beechhurst as a nurse in last illnesses and dangerous cases—a woman of heart and courage, though perhaps of too imaginative a style of conversation. Although it was but a work-day she was sitting at her own door in her Sunday black gown

and bonnet, and like Niobe, all tears. Mr Carnegie pulled up in sheer amazement at the deplorable spectacle his valued right hand was making of herself in public, and as if she had been on the watch for him up she rose from her stool, and came forward to answer his unspoken questions.

“Ay, Mr Carnegie, sir, you may well ask what I am doing at home all day idle,” said she. “It is a Judas I feel—and if I don’t get it off my mind, it will be too much for me—I can’t bear it, sir!”

“Then out with it, Mrs Wallop,” said the imperative doctor. “It is nothing very private or you would not advertise it by crying at the corner of the street.”

“No, sir, but it shames me to tell it, that it do, though you’re one o’them that well knows what flesh and blood comes to when the temptation’s strong. I’ve took money, Mr Carnegie, wage for a month to go nowheres else but to the rectory—and nobody ill there, only a might

happen. It never occurred to me the cruel sin I'd done till Robb came along, begging and praying of me to go to them forlorn poor creturs at Marsh-End. For it is the fever, sir. Mr Wiley got wind of it, and sent Robb over to make sure."

"Lost in misery they are! Fling away your dirty hire, and be off to Marsh-End, Mrs Wallop. Crying and denying your conscience will disagree very badly with your inside," said Mr Carnegie, angry contempt in his voice.

"I will, sir, and be glad to. It ain't christian, no, nor human natur, to sit with hands folded when there is sick folk wanting help. Poor Judas!" she went on in soliloquy, as the doctor trotted off. "I reckon his feelings changed above a bit between looking at the thirty pieces of silver and wishing he had 'un, and finding how heavy they was on his soul afore he was drove to get rid of 'em, and went out, and hanged himself. I won't do that anyhow, while I've a good charieter to fall back on, but

I'll return Mrs Wiley her money, and take the consequences if she sets it about as I'm not a woman of my word."

A few minutes more brought Mr Carnegie home with Bessie Fairfax to his own door. Hovering about on the watch for the doctor's return was Mr Wiley. Though there was no great love lost between them the rector was imbued with the local faith in the doctor's skill, and wanted to consult him.

"You have heard that the fever has broken out again?" he said, with visible trepidation.

"I have no case of fever myself. I hear that Robb has."

"Yes—two in one house. Now what precautions do you recommend against infection?"

"For nervous persons the best precaution is to keep out of the way of infection."

"You would recommend me to keep away from Marsh-End then? Moxon is nearer, though it is in my parish."

"I never recommend a man to dodge his

duty. Mrs Wallop will be of most use at present. She is just starting."

"Mrs Wallop! My wife has engaged her and paid her for a month in the event of any trouble coming amongst ourselves. You must surely be mistaken, Mr Carnegie?"

"Mrs Wiley was mistaken. She did not know her woman. Good morning to you, sir."

CHAPTER VIII.

FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES.

MRS CARNEGIE from the dining-room window witnessed the colloquy between the rector and her husband, and came out into the porch to receive her dear Bessie. "They will not expect you at Fairfield until they see you—so come in, love," said she, and Bessie gladly obeyed.

The doctor's house was all the quieter for the absence of the elder boys at Hampton. The other children were playing in the orchard after school. "It is a great convenience to have a school opened here where boys and girls are both taught from four up to ten, and very nicely taught," said the mother. "It gives me a little leisure. Even Totty goes, and likes it, bless her."

Mr Carnegie was not many minutes indoors. He ate a crust standing, and then went away again to answer a summons that had come since he went out in the morning.

"It will be a good opportunity, Bessie, to call on Miss Buff, and Miss Wort, and to say a word in passing to the Semples and Mittens—they are always polite in asking after you," Mrs Carnegie mentioned at the children's dinner. But Miss Buff having heard that Miss Fairfax was at the doctor's house forestalled these good intentions by arriving there herself. She was ushered into the drawing-room, and Bessie joined her, and was embraced and rejoiced over exuberantly.

"You dear little thing, I do like you in your habit," cried she. "Turn round—it fits beautifully! So you have been having a ride with the doctor, and seeing everybody, I suppose! Mrs Wiley wonders when you will call."

"Oh yes, Bessie dear, you must not neglect Mrs Wiley," said Mrs Carnegie.

"It will do some day with Lady Latimer—she has constant business at the rectory," Bessie said. She did not wish to waste this precious afternoon in duty visits to people she did not care for.

"Well, I was to have written to you, and I never did," recommenced Miss Buff.

"Out of sight, out of mind—don't apologise!"

But Miss Buff would explain and extenuate her broken promise. "The fact is, my hands are almost too full—what with the school and the committee, the organ and church, the missionary club and my district, I am a regular lay-curate. Then there is Mr Duffer's early service—eight o'clock—and Fridays and Wednesdays and all the saints' days, and decorating for the great festivals, perhaps a little too much of that, but on Whitsunday the chancel was lovely, was it not, Mrs Carnegie?" Mrs Carnegie nodded her acquiescence. "Then I have a green-house at last,

and that gives me something to do. I should like to show you my green-house, Bessie. But you must be used to such magnificent things now, that perhaps you will not care for my small place?"

"I shall care as much as ever. I prefer small things to great yet."

"And my fowl-house—you shall see that—and my pigeons. You used to be so fond of live creatures, Bessie."

"By the by, Miss Buff, have you discovered yet the depredator of your poultry-yard?" Mrs Carnegie asked.

"No, but I have put a stop to his depredations. I strongly suspect that pet subject of Miss Wort's—that hulking idle son of Widow Burt. I am sorry for *her*, but *he* is no good. You know I wrote to the inspector of police at Hampton. Did I not tell you? No! well, but I did, and said, if he would send an extra man over to stay the night in the house and watch who stole my pigeons, he should have

coffee and hot buttered toast; and I daresay Eppie would not have objected to sit up with him till twelve. However, the inspector didn't—he did not consider it necessary—but the ordinary police probably watched, for I have not been robbed since. And that is a comfort—I hate to sleep with one eye open! You are laughing, Bessie—you would not laugh if you had lost seven pigeons ready to go into a pie—and all in the space of ten days. I am sure that horrid Burt stole 'em."

Bessie still laughed. "Is your affection so material? Do you love your pigeons so dearly that you eat them up?" said she.

"What else should I keep them for? I should be overrun with pigeons but for putting them in pies—they make the garden very untidy as it is. I have given up keeping ducks, but I have a tame gull for the slugs.—Who is this at the gate? Oh! Miss Wort with her inexhaustible physic-bottle. Everybody seems to have heard that you are here, Bessie."

Miss Wort came in breathless, and paused, and greeted Bessie in a way that showed her wits were otherwise engaged. "It is the income-tax," she explained parenthetically, with an appealing look round at the company. "I have been so put out this morning—I never had my word doubted before. Jimpson is the collector this year"—

"Jimpson!" broke out Miss Buff impetuously. "I should like to know who they will appoint next to pry into our private affairs! As long as old Dobbs collected all the rates and taxes they were just tolerable, but since they have begun to appoint new men every year my patience is exhausted! Talk of giving us votes at elections—I would rather vote at twenty elections than have Tom, Dick, and Harry licenced to inquire into my money-matters. Since Dobbs was removed we have had for assessors of income-tax both the butchers, the baker, the brewer, the miller, the little tailor, the milk-man, and now Jimpson at the toy-

shop, of all good people! There will soon be nobody left but the sweep!"

"The sweep is a very civil man, but Jimpson is impertinent. I told him the sum was not correct, and he answered me: 'The government of the country must have money to carry on—I have nothing to do with the sum except to collect it. If you don't like it, ma'am, you've got to appeal, and go before the commissioners.' He may puzzle me with his figures, but he will never convince me I have the income, for I have not. And he said if I supposed he was fond of the job, I was mistaken."

"Can Mr Carnegie help you, Miss Wort? Men manage these things so much more easily than we do," said Mrs Carnegie kindly.

"Thank you, but I paid the demand as the least trouble, and to have done with it."

"Of course—I would pay half I am possessed of rather than go before the commissioners," said Miss Buff. "Old Phipps is one

of them—and here he is! Come to see you, Bessie—you are having quite a levee! I shall be off now.” Miss Buff rose and Miss Wort with her, but before they went there were some rallying speeches to be exchanged between Miss Buff and the quaint old bachelor. They were the most friendly of antagonists, and their animosity was not skin-deep—“Have you seen Lady Latimer since the last school committee, Mr Phipps?” asked Miss Buff, in mischievous allusion to their latest difference of opinion.

“No. I always keep as far as possible out of her ladyship’s way.”

“If you had her spirit of charity you would not avow it.”

“You take the name of charity in vain! ‘It is the beginning, the excuse, and the pretext for a thousand usurpations.’ Poverty has a new terror now-a-days in the officiousness of women with nothing to do but play at charity.”

Miss Wort shook her head and shut her eyes as if to stave off the shock of this profanity. Miss Buff only laughed the more merrily, and declared that Mr Phipps himself had as much to answer for as anybody in Beechhurst, if charity was a sin.

"I can charge myself with very few acts of charity," said he grimly. "I am not out of bonds to bare justice."

Mr Phipps was in his sarcastic vein, and shot many a look askance at Cinderella in the sofa corner with her plumed velvet hat lying on a chair beside her. She had been transformed into a most beautiful princess, there was no denying that. He had heard a confidential whisper respecting Mr Cecil Burleigh, and had seen that gentleman—a very handsome personage to play the part of prince in the story. Mr Phipps had curiosity, discernment, and a great shrewdness. Bessie had a happy face, and was enjoying her day in her old home; but she would never be Cinderella

in the nursery any more—never the little sun-burnt gipsy who delighted to wander in the Forest with the boys, and was nowhere so well pleased as when she might run wild. He told her so—he wanted to prove her temper since her exaltation.

“I shall never be only twelve years old again, and that’s true,” said Bessie, with a sportive defiance exceedingly like her former self. “But I may travel—who knows how far and wide, and come home browner than any berry! Grandpapa was a traveller once—so was my Uncle Laurence, in pursuit of antiquities, and my poor Uncle Frederick—you know he was lost in the Baltic? The gipsy wildness is in the blood—but I shall always come back to the Forest to rest.”

“She will keep up that delusion in her own mind to the last,” said Mr Phipps. Then after an instant’s pause, as if purposely to mark the sequence of his thoughts, he asked: “Is that gentleman who is staying at Fairfield with you

now, Mr Cecil Burleigh—a Woldshire man or south country ?”

“Woldshire,” said Bessie curtly ; and the colour mounted to her face at the boldness of her old friend’s insinuation.

Mr Phipps admired her anger, and went on with great coolness : “He has some reputation—member for Norminster, I think you said ? The Fairfaxes used to be great in that part of the county fifty years ago. And I suppose, Miss Fairfax, you can talk French now, and play on the piano ?”

Bessie felt that he was very impertinent, but she preserved her good humour, and replied laughing : “Yes, Mr Phipps, I can do a little of both, like other young ladies.” Mr Carnegie had now come in.

“The old piano is sadly out of tune, but perhaps, Bessie dear, you would give us a song before you go,” suggested her mother.

Bessie gracefully complied, but nobody

thought much of her little French canzonette. "It is but a tiny chirp, Bessie—we have better songs than that at home—eh, mother?" said the doctor, and that was all the compliment she got on her performance. Mr Phipps was amused by her disconcerted air—already she was beyond the circle where plain speaking is the rule, and false politeness the exception. She knew that her father must be right, and registered a silent vow to sing no more unless in private.

Just at this crisis a carriage drove up, and stopped at the gate. "It is the Fairfield carriage, come to carry you off, Bessie," said her mother. Lady Latimer looked out, and spoke to the footman, who touched his hat, and ran to the porch with his message,— "Would Miss Fairfax make haste—her ladyship was in a hurry."

"I must go," said Bessie, and took her hat. Mr Phipps sighed like an echo, and everybody

laughed. "Good-bye—but you will see me very soon again!" she cried from the gate—and then she got into the carriage.

"To Admiral Parkins'," said Lady Latimer, and they drove off on a round of visits, returning to Fairfield only in time to dress for dinner.

Just at that hour Harry Musgrave was coming back from his ramble in the red light of a gorgeous sunset, to be met by his mother with the news that Bessie Fairfax had called at the manor in the course of a ride with the doctor in the morning—and what a pity it was that he was out of the way; for he might have had a ride with them if he had not set off quite so early on his walk. Harry regretted too much what he had missed to have much to say about it—it was very unlucky. Bessie at Fairfield, he clearly discerned, was not at home for him, and Lady Latimer was not his friend. He had not heard any secrets respecting Mr Cecil

Burleigh, but a suspicion obscured his fancy since last night, and his mother's tidings threw him into a mood of dejection that made him as pale as a fond lover whom his lady has rebuffed.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW FRIENDS MAY FALL OUT.

MR AND MRS BERNARD and Mr Wiley were added to the dinner-party at Fairfield that evening, and Lady Latimer gave Miss Fairfax a quiet reminder that she might have to be on her guard; for the rector was as deficient in tact as ever. And so he proved. He first announced that the fever had broken out again at Littlemire and Marsh-End, after the shortest lull he recollected—thus taking away Mr Logger's present appetite, and causing him to flee from the Forest the first thing in the morning. Then he condoled with Mrs Bernard on a mis-hap to her child that other people avoided speaking of, for the consequences were likely to be very serious, and she had not yet been made

fully aware of them. There was a peculiar, low lugubrious note in his voice which caused it to be audible through the room, and Bessie who sat opposite to him, between Mr Cecil Burleigh and Mr Logger, devoted all her conversation to them to avoid that of the rector. But he had taken note of her at the moment of his entrance, and though the opportunity of remark had not been afforded him, he soon made it, beginning with inquiries after her grandfather. Then he reverted to Mr Fairfax's visit to Beechhurst four years ago, and spoke in a congratulatory, patronizing manner that was peculiarly annoying to Bessie.

"There is a difference between now and then—eh, Bessie? Mrs Wiley and I have often smiled at one naïve little speech of yours—about a nest-egg that was saving up for a certain event that young ladies look forward to. It must be considerably grown by now, that nest-egg—you remember, I see."

Anybody might see that Bessie remembered

—not her face only but her neck, her very arms burned.

“Secrets are not to be told out of the confessional,” said Mr Bernard. “Miss Fairfax, you blush unseen by me.”

There was a general low ripple of laughter, and everybody began to talk at once, to cover the young lady's palpable confusion. Afterwards Lady Latimer who had been amused, begged to know what that mysterious nest-egg might be. Bessie hesitated. “Tell us, *do* tell us,” urged Dora and Mrs Bernard—so Bessie told them. She had to mention the schemes for sending her to the Hampton Training School and Madame Michaud's millinery shop by way of making her story clear, and then Lady Latimer rather regretted that curiosity had prevailed, and manifested her regret by saying that Mr Wiley was one of the most awkward and unsafe guests she ever invited to her table. “I should have asked him to meet

Mr Harry Musgrave last night, but he would have been certain to make some remark or inquiry that would have hurt the young man's feelings or put him out of countenance."

"Oh, no!" said Bessie with a beautiful blushing light in her face, "Harry is above that. He has made his own place, and holds it with perfect ease and simplicity. I see no gentleman who is his better."

"You were always his advocate," Lady Latimer said with a sudden accession of coldness. "Oxford has done everything for him. Dora, close that window. Margaret, don't stand in a draught. Mr Harry Musgrave is a very plain young man."

"Aunt Olympia, no!" remonstrated Mrs Bernard, who had a suspicion of Miss Fairfax's tenderness in that quarter, and for kind sympathy would not have her ruffled.

But Bessie was quite equal to the occasion. "His plainness is lost in what Mr Logger calls

his power of countenance," said she. "And I'm sure he has a fine eye, and the sweetest smile I know."

Lady Latimer's visage was a study of lofty disapproval. "Has he but one eye?—I thought he had two. When young ladies begin to talk of young gentlemen's fine eyes and sweet smiles we begin to reflect. But they commonly keep such sentiments to themselves."

Dora and Bessie glanced at one another, and had the audacity to laugh. Then Mrs Bernard laughed and shook her head. My lady coloured ; she felt herself in a minority, and though she did not positively laugh, her lips parted, and her air of severity melted away. Bessie had cast off all fear of her with her old belief in her perfection. She loved her, but she knew now that she would never submit to her guidance. Lady Latimer glanced in the girl's brave, bright face, and said meaningly : "The nest-egg will not have been saving up unnecessarily if you condescend to such a folly

as *that*." And Bessie felt that my lady had got the last word for the present.

She looked guilty yet indignant at this open reference to what was no more than an unspoken vision. She had a thousand shy silent thoughts in her heart, but it was not for any one to drag them into the light. Lady Latimer understood that she had said too much, but she would not retract, and in this way their contention began. They were henceforward visibly in opposition. Mr Harry Musgrave called the next morning at Fairfield, and asked for Miss Fairfax. He was not admitted—he was told that she was not at home.

"But I was at home. Perhaps he is going back to London. I should have liked to see him," said Bessie when she heard.

"He came at eleven o'clock—who comes at eleven o'clock? Of course, Roberts said 'Not at home,'" replied my lady.

Bessie knew that Roberts would not have said "Not at home," unless he had received

orders to that effect. And, in fact, his orders were to say "Not at home" to Mr Harry Musgrave at any and every hour. Lady Latimer had pledged herself to secure the success of Mr Cecil Burleigh. She felt that Bessie was strong in her frank defiance, but if my lady could do no more for the discouraged suitor, she could, at least, keep his favoured rival at a distance. And this she did without a twinge of remorse. Bessie had a beautiful temper when she was pleased, but her whole soul rebelled against persecution ; and she considered it acute persecution to be taken out for formal drives and calls in custody of my lady and Mr Cecil Burleigh when her mother was probably mending the boys' socks, and longing for an hour or two of her company at Beechhurst, and Harry Musgrave was looking in every afternoon at the doctor's to see if, by good luck, she had gone over. Bessie was made aware of this last circumstance, and she reckoned it up with a daily accumulating sense of injury

against my lady and her client. Mr Cecil Burleigh found out before long that he was losing rather than gaining in her esteem. Miss Fairfax became not only stiff and cold, but perverse, and Lady Latimer began to feel that it was foolishly done to bring her to Fairfield. She had been put in the way of the very danger that was to be averted. Mr Harry Musgrave showed to no disadvantage in any company—Miss Fairfax had not the classic taste—Lady Angleby's tactics were a signal failure—her nephew it was who suffered diminution in the ordeal she had prescribed for his rival; and the sooner, therefore, that Miss Fairfax, "a most determined young lady," was sent back to Woldshire, the better for the family plans.

"I shall not invite Elizabeth Fairfax to prolong her visit," Lady Latimer said to Mr Cecil Burleigh, who, in his own mind, was sorry she had made it. "I am afraid that her temper is masterful." My lady was resolved to think

that Bessie was behaving very ill—not reflecting that a young lady pursued by a lover whom she does not love is allowed to behave worse than under ordinary circumstances.

Bessie would have liked to be asked to stay at Fairfield longer (which was rather poor-spirited of her), for though she did not go so much to her old home or to Brook as she desired and had expected, it was something to know that they were within reach. Her sense of happiness was not very far from perfect—the slight bitterness infused into her joy gave it a piquancy—and Lady Latimer presently had brought to her notice symptoms so ominous that she began to wish for the day that would relieve her from her charge.

One morning Mr Cecil Burleigh was pacing the garden without his hat, his head bent down, and his arms clasped behind him as his custom was, when Bessie, after regarding him with pensive abstraction for several minutes, re-

marked to Dora in a quaint, melancholy voice: "Mr Cecil Burleigh's hyacinthine locks grow thin—he is almost bald." My lady jumped up hastily to look, and declared it nonsense—it was only the sun shining on his head. Dora added that he was growing round-shouldered too——

"Why not say humpbacked at once?" exclaimed Lady Latimer angrily. Both the girls laughed—it was very naughty.

"But he is not humpbacked, Aunt Olympia," said the literal Dora.

My lady walked about in a fume, moved and removed books and papers, and tried to restrain a violent impulse of displeasure. She took up the review that contained Harry Musgrave's paper, and said with impatience: "Dora, how often must I beg of you to put away the books that are done with! surely this is done with?"

"I have not finished reading Harry's article

yet—please, let me take it,” said Bessie coming forward.

“ ‘ Harry’s article ’ ? What do you mean ? ” demanded Lady Latimer with austerity : “ ‘ Mr Harry Musgrave ’ would sound more becoming.”

“ I forgot to tell you—the paper you and Mr Logger were discussing the first evening I was here was written by Mr Harry Musgrave,” said Bessie demurely, but not without pride.

“ Oh, indeed ! The crudeness Mr Logger remarked in it is accounted for then,” said my lady, and Bessie’s triumph was abated. Also my lady carried off the review, and she saw it no more.

“ It is only Aunt Olympia’s way,” whispered Dora to comfort her. “ It will go off—she is very fond of you, but you must know you are dreadfully provoking. I wonder how you dare ! ”

“ And is not *she* dreadfully provoking ? ” rejoined Bessie, and began to laugh. “ But

I am too happy to be intimidated ! She will forgive me—if not to-day, then to-morrow, or if not to-morrow, then the day after—or I can have patience longer. But I will *not* be ruled by her—*never !* ”

CHAPTER X.

BETWEEN THEMSELVES.

It was on this day, when Bessie Fairfax's happiness primed her with courage to resist my lady's imperious will, that Harry Musgrave learnt for a certainty he had a rival. The rector was his informant. Mr Wiley overtook Harry sauntering in the Forest, and asked him how he did, adding that he regretted to hear from his mother that there was a doubt of his being able to continue his law studies in London, and reminding him of his own unheeded warnings against his ambition to rise in the world.

"Oh, I shall pull through, I trust," replied the young man betraying no disquiet. "My mother is a little fanciful, as mothers often are. You must not encourage her anxieties."

“You look strong enough, but appearances are sometimes deceptive. Take care of yourself—health is before everything. It was a pity you did not win that fellowship—I don’t know how you mean to live after you have got your call to the bar? You clever young fellows who rise from the ranks expect to carry the world before you, but it is a much harder matter than you think—your father cannot make you much of an allowance?”

Harry knew the rector’s tactless way too well to be affronted now by any remark he might make or any question he might ask. “My father has a liberal mind,” he said good-humouredly. “And a man hopes for briefs sooner or later.”

“It is mostly later unless he have singular ability or good connections—you must marry a solicitor’s daughter,” said the rector flourishing his stick. Harry said he would try to dispense with violent expedients. They walked on a minute or two in silence, and

then Mr Wiley said : " You have seen Miss Fairfax, of course ? she is on a visit at Fairfield."

" Yes. She has been at Brook," replied Harry with reticent coolness. " We all thought her looking remarkably well."

" Yes, beautiful—very much improved, indeed. My wife was quite astonished—but she has been living in the very best society. And have you seen Mr Cecil Burleigh ? "

Harry made answer that he had dined at Fairfield one evening, and had met Mr Cecil Burleigh there.

" Miss Fairfax's friends must be glad she is going to marry so well—so suitably in every point of view. It is an excellent match, and, I understand from Lady Latimer, all but settled. She is delighted ; for they are both immense favourites with her."

Harry Musgrave was dumb. Yet he did not believe what he heard—he could not believe it, remembering Bessie's kind, pretty

looks—why, her very voice had another, softer tone when she spoke to him! His name was music from her lips. The rector went on explaining the fame and anticipated future of Mr Cecil Burleigh in a vaguely confidential manner until they came to a spot where two ways met, and Harry abruptly said: “I was going to Littlemire to call on Mr Moxon, and this is my road.” He held out his hand and was moving off when Mr Wiley’s visage put on a solemn shade of warning.

“It will carry you through Marsh-End—I would avoid Marsh-End just now if I were you—a nasty, dangerous place! The fever is never long absent. I don’t go there myself at present.”

But Harry said there was a chance, then, that he might meet with his old tutor in the hamlet, and he started away, eager to be alone, and to escape from the rector’s observation; for he knew that he was betraying himself. He went swiftly along under the sultry shade in a

confused whirl of sensations. His confidence had suddenly failed him. He had counted on Bessie Fairfax for his comrade since he was a boy; the idea of her was woven into all his pleasant recollections of the past, and all his expectations in the future. Since that Sunday evening in the old sitting-room at Brook, her sweet, womanly figure had been the centre of his thoughts, his reveries. He had imagined difficulties, obstacles, but none with her. This real difficulty, this tangible obstacle, in the shape of Mr Cecil Burleigh, a suitor chosen by her family and supported by Lady Latimer, gave him pause. He could not affect to despise Mr Cecil Burleigh, but he vowed a vow that he would not be cheated of his dear little Bessie unless by her own consent. Was it possible that he was deceived in her? that he and she mistook her old childish affection for the passion that is strong as death? No—no, it could not be! If there was truth in her eyes, in her voice, she loved him as dearly as he

loved her, though never a word of love had been spoken between them! The young man wrought himself up into such a state of agitation and excitement that he never reached Marsh-End nor saw Mr Moxon at all that day. He turned, and bent his steps by a circuitous path to a woodland nook where he had left his friend Christie at work a couple of hours ago.

"Back again so soon—then you did not find Moxon at home?" said the artist, scarcely lifting an eye from the canvas.

Harry flung himself on the ground beside his friend and delivered his mind of its new burden. Christie now condescended to look at him, and to say calmly: "It is always well to know what threatens us, but there is no need to exaggerate facts. Mr Cecil Burleigh is a rival you may be proud to defeat—Miss Fairfax will please herself, and I think you are a match for him. You have the start."

"I know Bessie is fond of me—but she is a simple, warm-hearted girl, and is fond

of all of us," said Harry with a reflective air.

"I had no idea you were so modest. Probably she has a slight preference for *you*." Christie went on painting, and now and then a telling touch accentuated his sentiments. Harry hearkened, and grew more composed.

"I wish I had her own assurance of it!" said he.

"You had better ask her," said Christie.

After this they were silent for a considerable space, and the picture made progress. Then Harry began again—summing up his disadvantages. "Is it fair to ask her? Here am I, of no account as to family or fortune, and under a cloud as to the future, if my mother and Carnegie are justified in their warnings—and sometimes it comes over me that they are—why, Christie, what have I to offer her? Nothing, nothing but my presumptuous self!"

"Let her be judge—women have to put up with a little presumption in a lover."

"Would it not be great presumption? Consider her relations and friends, her rank and its concomitants—I cannot tell how much she has learnt to value them, how necessary they have become to her. Lady Latimer, who was good to me until the other day, is shutting her doors against me now as too contemptible."

"Not at all. The despotic old lady shuts her doors against you because she is afraid of you."

"What have I to urge except that I love her?"

"The best of pleas. Don't fear too much—give her leave to love you by avowing your love—that is what a girl waits for—if you let her go back to Woldshire without an understanding between yourselves she will think you care for your own pride more than for her."

"I wish she were little Bessie at Beechhurst again, and all her finery blown to the winds! I have not seen her for five days."

"That must be your own fault. You don't

want an ambassador? If you do, there's the post."

Harry was silent again. He was chiefly raising objections for the pleasure of hearing them contradicted—of course, he was not aware of half the objections that might have been cited against him as an aspirant to the hand of Miss Fairfax. In the depth of his heart there was a tenacious conviction that Bessie Fairfax loved him best in the world—with a love that had grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength, and would maintain itself independent of his failure or success in life. But, oh, that word *failure*! It touched him with a dreadful chill. He turned pale at it, and resolutely averted his mind from the idea.

He left young Christie with as little ceremony as he had rejoined him, and walked home to Brook, entering the garden from the wood. The first sight that met him was Bessie Fairfax, standing alone under the beeches.

At the moment he thought it was an illusion ; for she was all in bluish grey amongst the shadows ; but at the sound of the gate, she turned quickly, and came forward to meet him.

“I was just beginning to feel disappointed,” said she impulsively. “Lady Latimer brought me over to say good-bye, and we were told you had gone to Littlemire. She is in the sitting-room with your mother. I came out here.”

Harry’s face flushed so warmly that he had no need to express his joy in words. What a lucky event it was that he had met Mr Wiley, and had been turned back from his visit to his old tutor ! He was fatigued with excitement and his hurried walk, and he invited Bessie to sit with him under the beeches where they used to sit, watching the little stream as it ran by at their feet. Bessie was nothing loth—she was thinking that this was the last time they should meet for who could tell how long—and she complied with all her old child-like

submission to him, and a certain sweet appealing womanly dignity which, without daunting Harry at all, compelled him to remember that she was not any longer a child.

The young people were not visible from the sitting-room. Lady Latimer's head was turned another way when Harry and Bessie met, but the instant she missed her young charge she got up and looked out of the lattice. The boles and sweeping branches of the great beeches hid the figures at their feet, and Mrs Musgrave, observing that dear Bessie was very fond of the manor-garden, and had probably strolled into the wilderness, my lady accepted the explanation, and resumed her seat and her patience.

Meanwhile Harry did not waste his precious opportunity. He had this advantage, that when he saw Bessie he saw only the fair face that he worshipped, and thought nothing of her adventitious belongings, while in her absence he saw her surrounded by them, and

himself set at a vast conventional distance. He said that the four years since she left Beechhurst seemed but as one day, now they were together again in the old familiar places, and she replied that she was glad he thought so—for she thought so too. “I still call the Forest home, though I do not pine in exile. I return to it the day after to-morrow,” she told him.

“Good little philosophical Bessie!” cried Harry, and relapsed into his normal state of masculine superiority.

Then they talked of themselves, past, present, and future, now with animation, now again with dropped and saddened voices. The afternoon sun twinkled in the many-paned lattices of the old house in the background, and the brook sang on as it had sung from immemorial days before a stone of the house was built. Harry gazed rather mournfully at the ivied walls during one of their sudden silences, and then he told Bessie that the proprietor was ill,

and the manor would have a new owner by and by.

"I trust he will not want to turn out my father and mother and pull it down, but he is an improving landlord, and has built some excellent ugly farmsteads on his other property. I have a clinging to it, and the doctor says it would be well for me had I been born and bred in almost any other place."

Bessie sighed, and said deprecatingly :
"Harry, you look as strong as a castle! If it was Mr Christie they were always warning I should not wonder—but *you!*"

"But *me!* Little Christie looks as though a good puff of wind might blow him away, and he is as tough as a pin-wire. I stand like a tower, and they tell me the foundations are sinking. It sounds like a fable to frighten me!"

"Harry dear, it is not serious! don't believe it! Everybody has to take a little care. You must give up London and hard study if they

try you. We will all help you to bear the disappointment—I know it would be cruel ; but if you must, you must. Leaning towers, I've heard, stand hundreds of years, and serve their purpose as well as towers that stand erect."

"Ah, Bessie, cunning little comforter ! Tell me which is the worse—a life that is a failure or death ?" said Harry watching the gyrations of a straw that the eddies of the rivulet were whirling by.

"Oh, death, death ! There is no remedy for death !" Bessie shuddered. There was repulsion in her face as well as awe.

Harry felt surprised—this was his own feeling, but women, he thought had more natural resignation. Not so, however, his young comrade. She loved life, and hoped to see good days. He reminded her that she had lost both her parents early.

"Yes," she said, "but my other father and mother prevented me suffering from their loss.

I scarcely recollect it—I was such a happy child. It would be different now if any of those, young like myself, that I have grown up with, and love very much, were to pass out of sight, and I had to think that nowhere in the world could I find them any more.”

“It would touch you more personally. There ~~was~~ a young fellow drowned at Oxford whom I knew—we were aghast for a day, but the next we were on the river again—I recollect how bitterly you cried the morning your father was buried; all the afternoon you refused to be comforted, even by a sweet black puppy that I had brought over for the purpose, but in the evening you took to it, and carried it about in your pinafore—Oh, God and time are very good to us! We lose one love, another steps in to fill the void, and soon we do not remember that ever there was a void.”

Bessie was gazing straight away into heaven, her eyes full of sunshiny tears—thoughts of the

black puppy struggling with more pathetic thoughts. "We are very dismal, Harry," said she presently. "Is the moral of it how easily we should be consoled for each other's loss? Would you not pity me if I died? I should almost die of your death, I think."

"And if I am to live and never do any good, never to be famous, Bessie? If I come to you some day beaten and jaded—no honours and glories as I used to promise"—

"Why, Harry, unless it were your mother, no one would be kinder to you than I would," she said with exquisite tenderness, turning to look in his face, for he spoke in a strained, low voice as if it hurt him.

He took her hands, she not refusing to yield them, and said: "It is my belief that we are as fond of each other as ever we were, Bessie, and that neither of us will ever care half so much for anybody else?"

"It is my belief too, Harry." Bessie's eyes

shone, and her tongue trembled, but how happy she was! And he bowed his head for several minutes in silence.

There was a rustling in the bushes behind them—a bird, perhaps—but the noise recalled them to the present world—that and a whisper from Bessie, smiling again for pure content: “Harry, dear, we must not make fools of ourselves now—my lady might descend upon us at any moment!”

Harry sighed, and looked up with great content: “It is a compact, Bessie,” said he holding out his right hand.

“Trust me, Harry,” said she, and laid hers softly in his open palm.

Mrs Musgrave’s voice was heard from the sitting-room window: “Bessie! Bessie, dear, where are you? Lady Latimer wishes to go. Make haste; come in!” A bit of Bessie’s blue-grey dress had betrayed her whereabouts. And lo! the two young people emerged from the shelter of the trees, and quite at their

leisure sauntered up the lawn, talking with a sweet gay confidence, just as they used to talk when they were boy and girl, and Bessie came to tea at Brook, and they were the best friends in the world. Harry's mother guessed in a moment what had happened. Lady Latimer caught one glance and loftily averted her observation.

They had to go round to the hall-door, and they did not hurry themselves. They took time to assure one another how deep was their happiness, their mutual confidence, to promise a frequent exchange of letters, and to fear that they would not meet again before Bessie left Fairfield. Lady Latimer was seated in the carriage when they appeared in sight. Bessie got in meekly, and was bidden to be quicker. She smiled at Harry who looked divinely glad, and as they drove off rapidly, recollected that she had not said good-bye to his mother.

"Never mind—Harry will explain," she said aloud—evidently her thoughts were astray.

"Explain what? I am afraid there are many things that need explanation," said my lady austere—ly—and not another word until they reached home. But Bessie's heart was in perfect peace, and her countenance reflected nothing but the sunshine.

CHAPTER XI.

A LONG DULL DAY.

THAT evening Bessie Fairfax was charming. She was so happy. She was good and gracious again to Mr Cecil Burleigh, and she was never prettier. He basked in her content, without trying to understand it—thought more than ever what a buoyant, sweet-tempered woman she would be, to give a man rest and refreshment at home whose active life must be spent in the arid ways of the political world. Dora had her conjectures, and whispered them, but Bessie made no revelation, gave no confidences.

It must be *ages* before her league with Harry Musgrave could be concluded, and therefore let it be still, as it had been always, suspected but not confessed—unless she were over-urged by Harry's rival and her northern kinsfolk and

friends. Then she would declare her mind, but not before—Lady Latimer asked no questions. Her woman's discernment was not at fault, but she had her own opinion of youthful constancy, and early loves and early vows, and believed that when they were not to be approved, they were most judiciously ignored.

The next day was so fully occupied with engagements made beforehand that Bessie had no chance of going again to Beechhurst, but she did not make a grief of it—she could not have made a grief of anything just then. On the last morning, however, to her dear surprise, the doctor stopped at the door for a parting word of her mother's love and his own, and their hopes that she would soon be coming amongst them again; and when she went away an hour later, she went as joyous as she had come, though she knew that a report of her untoward behaviour had gone before her, and that the probabilities were she would enter

into an atmosphere of clouds the moment she reached Abbotsmead.

But it did not prove so. Lady Latimer had written cautiously and kindly—had not been able to give any assurance of Mr Cecil Burleigh's success, but had a feeling that it must come to pass. Elizabeth was a sweet girl, though she had the self-will of a child—in many points she was more of a child than my lady had supposed—in her estimate of individuals, and of their weight and position in the world, for instance—but this was a fault that knowledge of the world would cure.

Mr Fairfax was pleased to welcome his granddaughter home again, and especially pleased to see no sadness in her return. The Forest was ever so much nearer now—not out of her world at all. Bessie had travelled that road once and would travel it again. Every experience shortens such roads, lessens such difficulties between true friends. Bessie's

acquaintances came to call upon her, and she talked of the pleasure it had been to her to revisit the scenes of her childhood, of the few changes that had happened there since she came away, and of the hospitality of Lady Latimer.

The lime-trees were turning yellow and thin of leaf, there was a fire all day in the octagon parlour. It was autumn in Woldshire, soon to be winter. It seemed to Bessie on her return like resuming the dull routine of a life that had gone on for a long while. Mrs Stokes, as her nearest and most neighbourly neighbour, often ran across the park of an afternoon ; but Bessie's best delight was at post-time in the morning. Mr Fairfax never came downstairs to breakfast, and she had Harry Musgrave's letters all to herself, undiscovered and undisturbed.

The Squire never regained his strength or his perfect moral control, and the peculiar tempers of his previous life seemed to be exag-

gerated as his natural force decayed. Mr Oliver Smith was his most frequent and welcome visitor. They talked together of events past, and of friends long since dead. Perhaps this was a little wearisome and painful now and then to Mr Oliver Smith, who retained his youthful sprightliness amidst more serious sentiments. He would have had his old friend contemplate the great future that was approaching, instead of the unalterable past.

One day he said to Bessie: "I think your grandfather wanders in his mind sometimes—I fear he is failing."

"I don't know," was her reflective answer. "His thoughts often run on his sister Dorothy and Lady Latimer—I hear him mutter to himself the same words often: 'It was a life-long mistake, Olympia'—but that is true—is it not? He is as clear and collected as ever when he dictates to me a letter on business—he makes use of me as his secretary."

"Well, well, let us hope, then, God may

spare him to us for many years to come," said Mr Oliver Smith with that conventional propriety of speech which helps us through so many hard moments when feeling does not dictate anything real to say.

Bessie dwelt for some days after on that pious aspiration of her grandfather's old friend, but the ache and tedium of life did not return upon her. Her sense of duty and natural affection were very strong. She told herself that if it were her lot to watch for many years besides this dwindling flame, it was a lot of God's giving, not of her own seeking, and therefore good. The letters that came to her from Beechhurst and Caen breathed nothing but encouragement to love and patience, and Harry Musgrave's letters were a perpetual fount of refreshment. What delightful letters they were! He told her whatever he thought would interest or amuse her, or make his life palpable to her. He sent her books, he sent her proof-sheets to be read and returned—if

Bessie had not loved him so devotedly and all that belonged to him, she might have thought his literature a tax on her leisure. It was a wonder to all who knew her (without knowing her secret fund of joy) what a cheerful countenance she wore through this dreary period of her youth. Within the house she had no support but the old servants, and little change or variety from without. Those kind old ladies Miss Juliana and Miss Charlotte Smith were very good in coming to see her, and always indulged her in a talk of Lady Latimer and Fairfield; Miss Burleigh visited her occasionally for a day, but Lady Angleby kept out of the shadow on principle—she could not bear to see it lengthening. She enjoyed life very much, and would never be reminded of death if she could help it. Her nephew spent Christmas at Norminster, and paid more than one visit to Abbotsmead. Miss Fairfax was as glad as ever to see him. He came like a breath of fresh air from the living outer world, and made

no pretensions to what he knew she had not to give. The engagement between Miss Julia Gardiner and Mr Brotherton had fallen through for some reason that was never fully explained, and Miss Burleigh began to think her dear brother would marry poor Julia after all.

Another of Bessie's pleasures was a day in Minster Court. One evening she brought home a photograph of the three boys, and the old Squire put on his spectacles to look at it. She had ceased to urge reconciliation, but she still hoped for it earnestly ; and it came in time, but not at all as she expected. One day—it was in the early spring—she was called to her grandfather's room, and there she found Mr John Short sitting in council, and looking exceedingly discontented. The table was strewn with parchments and papers, and she was invited to take a seat in front of the confusion. Then an abrupt question was put to her. Would she prefer to have settled upon her the Abbey Lodge which Colonel

Stokes now occupied as a yearly tenant, or a certain house in the suburbs of Norminster going out towards Brentwood ?

"In what event ?" she asked, colouring confusedly.

"In the event of my death, or your own establishment in life," said her grandfather. "Your Uncle Laurence will bring his family here, and I do not imagine that you will choose to be one with them long. You will prefer a home of your own."

The wave of colour passed from Bessie's face : "Dear grandpapa, don't talk of such remote events—it is time enough to think of changes, and decide when the time comes," said she.

"That is no answer, Elizabeth. Prudent people make their arrangements in anticipation of changes, and their will in anticipation of death. Speak plainly—do you like the Lodge as a residence, or the vicinity of Norminster ?"

"Dear grandpapa, if you were no longer

here I should go home to the Forest," Bessie said, and grew very pale.

The old Squire neither moved nor spoke for several minutes. He stared out of the window—then he glanced at the lawyer, and said : "You hear, Short—now you will be convinced. She has not taken root enough to care to live here any longer. She will go back to the Forest—all this time she has been in exile, and cut off from those whom alone she loves. Why should I keep her waiting at Abbotsmead for a release that may be slow to come ? Go now, Elizabeth, go now, if to stay wearies you,"—and he waved her to the door imperatively.

Bessie rose trembling, and left the room, tears and indignation struggling for the mastery : "O grandpapa ! why will you say such things ?" was all her remonstrance, but she felt that there are some wrongs in this life very hard to bear.

Mr John Short sat mute for some time after

the young lady's departure. The Squire gloomed sorrowfully: "From first to last my course is nothing but disappointment."

"I wish, sir, you could be prevailed on to see Mr Laurence?" suggested the lawyer. "His wife is a very good little lady, and the boys you might be proud of. Pray, sir, give yourself that chance of happiness for your closing days."

"I had other plans. There will be no marriage, Short—I understand Elizabeth. In warning me that she will return to the Forest when I am gone, she just tells me that my hopes of her and Burleigh are all moonshine. Well, let Laurence come. Let him come, and take possession with his children—they can leave me my corner of the house in peace. I shall not need it very long. And Elizabeth can go *home* when she pleases."

Mr Fairfax's resentment was very bitter against Bessie, at first, for the frank exposition she had made of her future intentions. She

had meant no unkindness, but simple honesty. He did not take it so, and when her customary duty and service brought her next into his presence, he made her feel how deeply she had offended. He rejected her offer to read to him, put aside her helping hand, and said he would have Jonquil to assist him—she need not remain. He uttered no accusation against her, and no reproach, he gave her no opportunity of softening her abrupt announcement—he just set her at a distance, as it were, and made himself unapproachable. Bessie betook herself in haste to her white parlour, to hide the blinding tears in her eyes, and the mortification in her heart. “And he wonders that, so few love him!” she said to herself—not without anger even in her pitiful yearning to be friends again.

A week of alienation followed this scene, and Bessie was never more miserable. Day by day she tried to resume her loving care of her grandfather, and day by day she was coldly

repulsed. Jonquil, Macky, Mrs Betts, all sympathised in silence—their young lady was less easy to condole with now than when she was fresh from school. The old Squire was as wretched as he made his granddaughter. He had given permission for his son to come to Abbotsmead, and he seemed in no haste to embrace the permission. When he came, at last, he brought little Justus with him, but he had to say that it was only for a few hours. In fact, his wife was extremely unwilling to abandon their happy, independent home in the Minster Court, and he was equally unwilling to force her inclination. Mr Fairfax replied: “You know best,” and gazed at his grandson who, from between his father’s knees, gazed at him again without any advance towards good-fellowship. A formal reconciliation ensued, but that was all. For the kindness that springs out of a warm, affectionate nature the old Squire had to look to Elizabeth, and without any violent transition they glided back

into their former habits and relations. Bessie was saddened a little by her late experiences, but she was not quite new to the lesson that the world is a place of unsatisfied hopes, and defeated intentions.

Mr John Short was often to and fro between Abbotsmead and Norminster during that summer, and an idea prevailed in the household that the Squire was altering his will again. His son Frederick had died intestate, and the Squire had taken possession of what he left. The poor lady in seclusion at Caen died also about this time, and a large addition was made to Mr Fairfax's income—so large that his loss by the Durham lawsuit was more than balanced. The lawyer looked far from pleasant while transacting his client's business. It was true that Mr Frederick Fairfax had left no will, but he had expressed certain distinct intentions, and these intentions, to the indignant astonishment of many persons, his father would not carry out. Mr Forbes talked to

him of the sacredness of his son's wishes ; but the Squire had a purpose for the money, and was obstinate in his refusal to relinquish it. Some people decided that thus he meant to enrich his granddaughter without impoverishing Abbotsmead for his successor ; but Mr John Short's manner to the young lady was tinctured with a respectful compassion that did not augur well for her prospects.

Bessie paid very little heed to the speculations of which she could not fail to hear something. So long as her grandfather was tolerably kind to her she asked no more from the present, and she left the future to take care of itself. But it cannot be averred that he was invariably kind. There seemed to lurk in his mind a sense of injury which he visited upon her in sarcastic jibes and allusions to the Forest, taunting her with impatience to have done with him, and begone to her dearer friends. Bessie resented this for a little while, but by and by she ceased to be affected, and

treated it as the pettishness of a sick old man, never used to be considerate for others. He kept her very much confined, and gave her scant thanks for her care of him. If Mr Cecil Burleigh admired patience and forbearance in a woman, he had the opportunity of studying a fair example of both in her. He pitied her secretly, but she put on no martyr-airs: "It is nothing—Oh, no, grandpapa is not difficult—it is only his way. Most people are testy when they are ill," she would plead, and she believed what she said. The early sense of repulsion and disappointment once overcome, she was too sensible to bewail the want of unselfish affection where it had never existed before.

The Squire had certain habits of long standing—habits of coldness, distance, reserve, and he never changed materially. He survived through the ensuing autumn and winter, and finally sank during the north-easterly weather of the following spring, just two years after

the death of his son Frederick. Jonquil and Macky, who had been' all his life about him, were his most acceptable attendants. He did not care to have his son Laurence with him, and when the children came over, it was not by his invitation. Mr Forbes visited him almost daily, and Mr Cecil Burleigh came down from London twice at his request. Bessie remitted no act of tender thoughtfulness, and one day, shortly before the end, he said to her: "You are a good girl, Elizabeth." She smiled, and said: "Am I, grandpapa?" but his persistent coldness had brought back her shy reticence, and neither said any more. Perhaps there was compunction in the old man's mind—the cast of his countenance was continually that of regret,—but there was no drawing near in heart or confidence ever again, and the Squire died in the isolation of feeling with which living he had chosen to surround himself. The world, his friends,

neighbours and servants said that he died in honour, respected by all who knew him ; but for long and long after Bessie could never think of his death without tears—not because he had died—but because so little sorrow followed him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SQUIRE'S WILL.

THROUGHOUT his life Mr Fairfax had guided his actions by a certain rule of justice that satisfied himself. The same rule was evident in his last will. His granddaughter had given him to understand that she should return to the Forest, and cast in her lot with the humble friends from amongst whom he had taken her, and the provision he made for her was consonant with that determination. He bequeathed to her a sum of five thousand pounds, a sufficient portion, as he considered, for that rank in life, and to Mr Cecil Burleigh he bequeathed the handsome fortune that it was intended she should bring him in marriage. He had the dower without the bride, and though Lady Angleby and his sister quietly intimated to

astonished friends that they had good reason to hope Miss Fairfax would ultimately be no loser by her grandfather's will, her Uncle Laurence was not the only person by many who judged her unkindly and unfairly treated. But it was impossible to dispute the old Squire's ability to dispose of his property, or his right to dispose of it as he pleased. He had been mainly instrumental in raising Mr Cecil Burleigh to the position he occupied, and there was a certain obligation incurred to support him in it. If Mr Fairfax had chosen to make a son of him, no one had a right to complain. No one did complain ; the expression of opinion was extremely guarded.

Bessie was informed of the terms of her grandfather's will in the first shock of surprise,—afterwards her Uncle Laurence reflected that it would have been wise to keep them from her, but the deed was done. She received the news without emotion—she blushed, put up her eyebrows, and smiled as she said : “Then

I am a poor young woman again ?” She saw, at once, what was absurd, pathetic, vexatious in her descent from the dignity of riches ; but she was not angry. She never uttered a word of blame or reproach against her grandfather, and when it was indignantly recalled to her that Mr Cecil Burleigh was put into possession of what ought to have been hers, she answered : “There is no *ought* in the matter. Grandpapa had a lively interest in Mr Cecil Burleigh’s career for the sake of the country as well as for his own sake, and if you ask me my sentiments, I must confess that I feel the money grandpapa has left him is well bestowed. It would be a shame that such a man should be hampered by mean cares and insufficient fortune.”

“Oh, if you are satisfied, that is enough,” was the significant rejoinder, and Lady Angleby’s hopes had a wider echo.

To Mr Cecil Burleigh his old friend’s bequest was a boon to be thankful for, and he

was profoundly thankful. It set him above troublesome anxieties, and lifted his private life into the sphere of comfort. But his first visit to Abbotsmead and first meeting with Miss Fairfax after it was communicated to him tried his courage not a little. The intimacy that had been kept up, and even improved during Mr Fairfax's decline, had given him no grounds for hoping better success with Elizabeth as a lover than before, and yet he was convinced that in leaving him this fine fortune the Squire had continued to indulge his expectations of their ultimate union. That Elizabeth would be inclined towards him in the slightest degree by the fact of his gaining the inheritance that she had forfeited, he never for one moment dreamed—the contrary might be possible, but not that. Amongst the many and important duties and interests that engaged him now he had neither leisure nor desire for sentimental philandering. He was a very busy man of the world, and wished for

the rest of a home. Insensibly his best thoughts reverted to his dear Julia, never married, still his very good friend. He approved the sweet rosy face of Elizabeth Fairfax, her bright spirit and loving, unselfish disposition, but he found it impossible to flatter himself that she would ever willingly become his wife. Lady Angleby insisted that honour demanded a renewal of his offer, but Elizabeth never gave him an opportunity; and there was an end of his uncertainties when she said one day to his sister (after receiving an announcement of her own approaching marriage to Mr Forbes): "And there is nothing now to stand between your brother and Miss Julia Gardiner—I am truly glad grandpapa left him an independence—they have been so faithful to each other!"

Miss Burleigh looked up surprised, as if she thought Bessie must be laughing at them. And Bessie was laughing—"Not quite constant, perhaps, but certainly faithful," she

persisted. But Mr Cecil Burleigh had probably appreciated her blossoming youth more kindly than his dear Julia had appreciated her autumnal widower. Bessie meant to convey that neither had any right to complain of the other, and that was true. Miss Burleigh carried Miss Fairfax's remarks to her brother, and after that they were privately agreed that it would be poor Julia after all.

Mr Laurence Fairfax insisted that his niece should live at Abbotsmead, and continue in possession of the white suite until she was of age. He was her guardian, and would take no denial.

"It wants but three months to that date," she told him.

"Your home is here until you marry, Elizabeth," he rejoined in a tone that forbade contradiction. "You shall visit Lady Latimer, but subject to permission. Remember you are a Fairfax. Though you may go back to the Forest, it is a delusion to imagine that you can

live comfortably in the crowded household where you were happy as a child. You have been six years absent—three of them you have spent in the luxurious ease of Abbotsmead. You have acquired the tastes and habits of your own class—a very different class. You must look to me now—your pittance is not enough for the common necessities of life.”

“Not so very different a class, Uncle Laurence, and fortunately I am not in bondage to luxurious ease,” Bessie said. “But I will not be perverse. Changes come without seeking, and I am of an adaptable disposition. The other day I was supposed to be a great heiress; to-day I have no more than a bare competence.”

“Not even that—but if you marry suitably you may be sure that I shall make you a suitable settlement,” rejoined her kinsman. Bessie speculated in silence and many times again what her Uncle Laurence might mean by

"suitably," but they had no explanation, and the occasion passed.

Bessie's little fortune was vested in the hands of trustees, and settled absolutely to her own use. She could not anticipate her income, nor make away with it, which Mr Carnegie said was a very good thing. Beyond that remark, and a generous reminder that her old nest under the thatch was ready for her whenever she liked to return and take possession, nothing was said in the letters from Beechhurst about her grandfather's will or her new vicissitude. She had some difficulty in writing to announce her latest change to Harry Musgrave, but he wrote back promptly and decisively to set her heart at rest, telling her that to his notions, her fortune was a very pretty fortune, and avowing a prejudice against being maintained by his wife—he would greatly prefer that she should be dependent upon him. Bessie, who was a loving woman far more than a proud or ambitious

one, was pleased by his assurance, and in answering him again, she confessed that would have been her choice too. Nevertheless she became rather impatient to see him and talk the matter over—the more so because Harry manifested little curiosity to learn anything of her family affairs unless they immediately affected herself. He told her that he should be able to go down to Brook at the end of August, and he begged her to meet him there. This she promised, and it was understood between them that if she was not invited to Fairfield, she would go to the doctor's house, even though the boys might be at home for their holidays.

Bessie was long enough at Abbotsmead after her grandfather's death to realise how that event affected her own position there. The old servants had been provided for by their old master, and they left—Jonquil, Macky, Mrs Betts, and others, their contemporaries. Bessie missed their friendly faces, and dis-

pensed with the services of a maid. Then Mrs Fairfax objected to Joss in the house, lest he should bite the children, and Janey and Ranby were not entirely at her beck and call as formerly. The incompetent Sally, who sang a sweet cradle-song, became quite a personage, and sovereign in the nursery, and was jealous of Miss Fairfax's intrusion into her domain. It was inevitable and natural, but Bessie appreciated better now the forethought of her grandfather in wishing to provide her with a roof of her own. Abbotsmead under its new Squire, all his learning and philosophy notwithstanding, promised to become quite a house of the world again; for his beautiful young wife was proving of a most popular character, and attracted friends about her with no effort. Instead of old Lady Angleby, the Hartwell people and the Chivertons, came the Tindals, Edens, Raymonds, Lefevres, and Wynyards; and Miss Fairfax felt herself an object of curiosity amongst them as the young lady

who had been all but disinherited for her obstinate refusal to marry the man of her grandfather's choice. She was generally liked, but she was not just then in the humour to cultivate anybody's intimacy. Mrs Stokes was still her chief resource when she was solitary.

She had a private grief and anxiety of her own, of which she could speak to none. One day her expected letter from Harry Musgrave did not come—it was the first time he had failed her since their compact was made. She wrote herself, as usual, and asked why she was neglected. In reply she received a letter, not from Harry himself, but from his friend Christie, who was nursing him through an attack of inflammation occasioned by a chill from remaining in his wet clothes after an upset on the river. She gathered from it that Harry had been ill and suffering for nearly a fortnight, but that he was better, though very weak, and that if Christie had been

permitted to do as he wished Mrs Musgrave would have been sent for, but her son was imperative against it. He did not think it was necessary to put her to that distress and inconvenience, and as he was now in a fair way of recovery, it was his particular desire that she should not be alarmed and made nervous by any information of what he had passed through. But he would not keep it from his dear Bessie, who had greater firmness, and who might rest assured he was well cared for, as Christie had brought him to his own house, and his old woman was a capital cook—a very material comfort for a convalescent.

With a recollection of the warnings of a year and a half ago, Bessie could not but ponder this news of Harry's illness with grave distress. She wrote to Mr Carnegie, and enclosed the letter for his opinion. Mr Carnegie respected her confidence, and told her that from the name of the physician mentioned by Christie as in attendance on his patient, he was in the best

possible hands. She confessed to Harry what she had done, and he found no fault with her, but his next letter was in a vein of melancholy humour from beginning to end ; he was going back, he said, to his dismal chambers, his law-books and his scribbling, and she was to send him a very bright letter, indeed, to cheer him in his solitude. How Bessie wished she could have flown herself to cheer him ! And now, too, she half regretted her poverty under her grandfather's will that deferred all hope of his rescue from London smoke and toil till he had made the means of rescue for himself. But she gave him the pleasure of knowing what she would do if she could.

Thus the summer months lapsed away. There was no hiatus in their correspondence again, but Harry told her that he had a constant fever on him, and was longing for home and rest. Once he wrote from Richmond, whither he had gone with Christie, " The best fellow in the universe—love him, dear Bessie,

for my sake"—and once he spoke of going to Italy for the winter, and of newspaper letters that were to pay the shot. He was sad, humorous, tender by turns—but Bessie missed something. There were allusions to the vanity of man's life and joy ; now and then there was a word of philosophy, for future consolation, but of present hope there was nothing. Her eyes used to grow dim over these letters—she understood that Harry was giving in, that he found his life too hard for him, and that he was trying to prepare her and himself for this great disappointment.

When parliament rose Mr Cecil Burleigh came down to Norminster, and paid a visit to Abbotsmead. He was the bearer of an invitation to Brentwood and his sister's wedding, but Miss Fairfax was not able to accept it. She had just accepted an invitation to Fairfield.

CHAPTER XII.

TENDER AND TRUE.

LADY LATIMER was in possession of all the facts and circumstances of her guest's position when she arrived at Fairfield. Her grandfather's will was notorious, and my lady did not entirely disapprove of it as Bessie's humbler friends did; for she still cherished expectations in Mr Cecil Burleigh's interest, and was not aware how far he was now from entertaining any on his own account. Though she had convinced herself that there was an unavowed engagement between Mr Harry Musgrave and Miss Fairfax, she was resolved to treat it and speak of it as a very slight thing, indeed, and one that must be set aside without weak tenderness. Having such clear and decided views

on the affair, she was not afraid to state them, even to Bessie herself.

Harry Musgrave had not yet arrived at Brook, but after a day devoted to her mother, Bessie's next opportunity for a visit was devoted to Harry's mother. She mentioned to Lady Latimer where she was going, and though my lady looked stern she did not object. On Bessie's return, however, she found something to say, and cast off all reserves.

"Mr Harry Musgrave has not come, but he is coming. Had I known beforehand, I should have preferred to have you here in his absence. Elizabeth, I shall consider that young man very deficient in honourable feeling if he attempt to interfere between you and your true interest."

"That I am sure he never will," said Bessie with animation.

"He is not over-modest. If you are advised by me you will be distant with him—you will give him no advantage by which he may imagine himself encouraged. Any foolish

promise that you exchanged when you were last here must be forgotten."

Bessie replied with much quiet dignity : "You know, Lady Latimer, that I was not brought up to think rank and riches essential, and the experience I have had of them has not been so enticing that I should care to sacrifice for their sake a true and tried affection. Harry Musgrave and I are dear friends, and since you speak to me so frankly, I will tell you that we propose to be friends for life."

Lady Latimer grew very red, very angry : "Do you tell me that you will marry that young man—without birth, without means, without a profession even? What has he, or is he, that should tempt you to throw away the fine position that awaits your acceptance."

"He has a real kindness for me, a real unselfish love, and I would rather be enriched with that than be ever so exalted. It is an old promise. I always did love Harry Musgrave, and never anybody else."

Lady Latimer fumed, walked about and sat down again : "How are you to live ?"

"I don't know," said Bessie cheerfully. "Like other young people—partly on our prospects. But we do not talk of marrying yet."

"It is a relief to hear that you do not talk of marrying yet—though how you can dream of marrying young Mr Musgrave at all, when you have Mr Cecil Burleigh at your feet, is to me a strange, incomprehensible infatuation."

"Mr Cecil Burleigh is not at my feet any longer. He has got up and gone back to Miss Julia Gardiner's feet, which he ought never to have left. Grandpapa's will has the effect of making two charming people happy, and I am glad of it."

"Is it possible ?" said Lady Latimer in a low, chagrined voice. "Then you have lost him ! I presume that you felt the strain of such high companionship too severe for you ? Early habits cling very close."

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It was about a week after this, when Bessie was spending a few hours with her mother, that she heard of Harry Musgrave's arrival at Brook. It was the doctor who brought the intelligence. He came into the little drawing-room where his wife and Bessie were sitting, and said : "I called at Brook in passing, and saw poor Harry."

"Well, Thomas, and how is he?" inquired Mrs Carnegie in the anxious tone a kind voice takes when asking after the health of a friend who may be in a critical way. Bessie dropt her work, and looked from one to the other.

The doctor did not answer directly, but addressing Bessie, he said : "You must not be shocked, my dear, when you see Harry Musgrave."

"What is the matter? I have heard nothing—is he ill again?" cried Bessie.

"He must never go back to London," said Mr Carnegie with a great sigh.

"Is it so bad as that? Poor Harry!" said
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his wife in a sad, suppressed tone. Bessie said nothing—her throat ached, her eyes burnt, but she was too stunned and bewildered to inquire further—and yet she thought she had been prepared for something like this.

“He asked after you, Bessie, and when you would go to see him,” the doctor went on.

“I will go now—it is not too late? he is not too tired? Will he be glad?” Bessie said all in a breath.

“Yes, he wants to talk to you—but you will have to walk all the way, dear—and alone, for I have to go the other road.”

“Oh, the walk will not hurt me. And when I have seen him I will go back to Fairfield. But tell me what ails him—has he been over working, or is it the results of his illness?” Bessie was very earnest to know all there was to be known.

“Work is not to blame—the lad was always more or less delicate, though his frame was so powerful,” Mr Carnegie said with gravity.

“He is out of spirits, and he has had a warning to beware of the family complaint. That is not to say it has marked him yet—he may live for years, with care and prudence, live to a good old age, but there is no public career before him ; and it is a terrible prospect this giving up and coming down to a young fellow of his temper. His mother sits and looks at him, beats on her knee, deplores the money spent on his college education, and frets—you must try your hand at some other sort of consolation, Bessie, for that will never do. Now, if you are going, my dear, you had better start.”

Mrs Carnegie wished she could have offered herself as Bessie's companion, but she would have been an impediment rather than a help, and Bessie set out alone. She had gone that way to Brook many and many a time, but never quite alone before. It seemed, at first, strange to her to be walking across the open heath by herself, and yet she felt, somehow,

as if it had all happened before—perhaps in a dream. It was a warm afternoon towards six o'clock, and the August glow of the heather in blossom spread everywhere like a purple sea. At the gate of the Forest Farm the cows were gathered, with meek patience expecting their call to the milking-shed ; but after she passed under the shade of the trees beyond great Ash-Ford, she met not a creature until she came in sight of the wicket opening into the wood from the manor-garden. And there was Harry Musgrave himself.

Approaching over the turf with her light swift foot, Bessie drew quite near to him unheard, and saw him before he saw her. He had seated himself on a fallen tree, and leant his head on his hand in an easy attitude ; his countenance was abstracted rather than sad, and his eyes, fixed on the violet and amber of the sky in the west, were full of tranquil watching. Bessie's voice as she cried out

his name was tremulous with joy, and her face as he turned and saw her was beautiful with the flush of young love's delight.

"I was waiting for you! I knew you would come, my dear, my dear!" was his greeting. They went into the garden, hand in hand, silent—they looked at each other with assured happiness. Harry said: "You are all in black, Bessie."

"Yes—for poor grandpapa. Don't you remember? I will put it off to-morrow if you dislike it."

"Put it off; I *do* dislike it—you have worn it long enough." They directed their steps to their favourite seat under the beeches, but Mrs Musgrave, restless since her son's arrival, and ever on the watch, came down to them with a plea that they would avoid the damp ground and falling dew. The ground was dry as dust, and the sun would not set yet for a good hour.

"There is the sitting-room if you want

to be by yourselves," she said plaintively. "Perhaps you'll be able to persuade Harry to show some sense, Bessie Fairfax, and feeling for his health—he won't listen to his mother."

She followed them into the spacious old room, and would have shut the lattices because the curtains were gently flapping in the evening breeze, but Harry protested. "Mother dear, let us have air—it is life and pleasure to me. After the sultry languor of town this is delicious."

"There you go, Harry, perverse as ever! He never could be made to mind a draught, Bessie; and though he has just been told that consumption is in the family, and carried off his uncle Walter—every bit as fine a young man as himself—he pays no heed. He might as well have stopped on the farm from the beginning, if this was to be the end. I am more mortified than tongue can tell!"

Harry stood gazing at her with a pitiful pati-

ence, and said kindly, "You fear too much, mother. I shall live to give you more trouble yet."

"Even trouble's precious if that's all my son's likely to give me. I would rather have trouble than nothing." She went out, closing the door softly, as if she were leaving a sick-room. Bessie felt very sorry for her, and when she looked at Harry again, and saw the expression of helpless, painful regret in his face, she could have wept for them both.

"Poor mother! she is bitterly disappointed in me, Bessie!" he said, dropping into one of the huge old elbow-chairs.

"O Harry, it is all her love! She will get over this, and you will repay her hurt pride another day," cried Bessie, eager to comfort him.

"Shall I, Bessie? but how? but when? We must take counsel together. They have been telling me it is selfish, and a sacrifice, and unmanly to bind Bessie to me now, but I

see no sign that Bessie wants her freedom," he said looking at her with laughing wistful eyes, always with that sense of masculine triumph which Bessie's humility had encouraged.

"O Harry! I want no freedom but the freedom to love and serve you!" cried she with a rush of tears, and a hand held out to him. And then with an irresistible, passionate sorrow, she fell on her knees beside him, and hid her face on his shoulder. He put his arm round her and held her fast for several minutes, himself too moved to speak. He guessed what this sudden outburst of feeling meant—it meant that Bessie saw him so altered, saw through his quiet humour into the deep anxiety of his heart.

"I'll conceal nothing from you, Bessie—I don't think I have felt the worst of my defeat yet," were his words when he spoke at last. She listened, still on her knees. "It is a common thing to say that suspense is worse to bear than certainty—but the certainty that

destroys hope, and makes the future a blank, is very like a mill-stone hanged round a man's neck to sink him in a slough of despondency. I never really believed it until Dr Courteney told me that if I wish to save my life it must be at the cost of my ambition—that I can never be an advocate, a teacher, a preacher, that I shall have to go softly all my days, and take care that the winds don't blow on me too roughly—that I must be an exile from English fogs and cold, let me prefer home ever so dearly—that I must read only a little, and write only a little, and avoid all violent emotions—and be in fact, the creature I have most despised—a poor valetudinarian, always feeling my own pulse and considering my own feelings.”

“You will have to change much more before you will come to that—and I never knew you despise anybody, Harry,” Bessie said with gentle deprecation. “You had a tender heart from a boy—and others feel kindly towards you.”

“And come what may, my dear little Bessie will keep her faith to me?” said Harry looking down into her sweet eyes.

“Yes, Harry.”

After a pause he spoke again. “You have done me good, dear—I shall rest better for having talked to you to-night. It is in the night-time that thought is terrible. For months past—ever since I was ill in the spring—the foreshadow of failure has loomed dark and close upon me like a suffocating weight. What I must do, how I must live without being a tax on my father—if I am to live—what he and my mother would feel, what old friends would say—who could or would help me to some harmless occupation, and whether I should not, for everybody’s sake, be better out of the world.”

“O Harry, but that was faint-hearted!” said Bessie with a touch of reproach. “You forgot me then?”

“I have had several strokes of bad luck

lately ; or, perhaps, I ought to suspect that not being in good case my work was weak. Manuscript after manuscript has been returned on my hands. Surely this was discouraging ? There, on the table, is a roll of which I had better hopes—and I found it awaiting me here.”

“ May I take it to Fairfield, and read it ? ” Bessie asked. “ It is as big as a book.”

“ Yes—if it were printed and bound it would be a book. Read it, and let me know how it impresses you.”

Bessie looked mightily glad : “ If you will let me help you, Harry, you will make me happy,” said she. “ What is it about ? ”

“ It is a story, for your comfort—a true story. I could not devise a plot, so I fell back on a series of pathetic facts. Life is very sad, Bessie ! Why are we so fond of it ? ”

“ We take it in detail, as we take the hours of the day and the days of the year—and it is very endurable. It has seemed to me some-

times that those whom we call fortunate are the least happy—and that the hard lot is often lifted into the sphere of blessedness. Consider Mr and Mrs Moxon—they appear to have nothing to be thankful for, and yet, in their devotion to one another, what perfect peace and consolation ! ”

“ O Bessie, but it is a dreadful fate ! ” said Harry. “ Poor Moxon, who began life with as fine hopes and as solid grounds for them as any man—there he is vegetating at Littlemire still, his mind chiefly taken up with thinking whether his sick wife will be a little more or a little less suffering to-day than she was yesterday.”

“ I saw them last week, and could have envied them ! She is as near an angel as a woman can be ; and he was very contented in the garden, giving lessons to a village boy in whom he has discovered a genius for mathematics. He talked of nothing else.”

“ Poor boy ! poor genius ! And are we to

grow after the Moxons' pattern, Bessie—meek, patient, heavenly?" said Harry.

"By the time our hair is white, Harry, I have no objection—but there is a long meanwhile," replied Bessie with brave uplooking face. "We have love between us, and about us, and that is the first thing. The best pleasures are the cheapest—we burden life with too many needless cares. You may do as much good in an obscure groove of the world as you might do if your name was in all men's mouths. I don't believe that I admire very successful people."

"That is lucky for us both, since I am a poor fellow whose health has given way—who is never likely to have any success at all."

"You don't know, Harry—but this is not the time to remember pride and ambition—it is the time to recover all the health and strength you can; and with them hope and power will return. What do you most enjoy in the absence of work?"

“ Fresh air, fine scenery, and the converse of men. To live plainly is no hardship to me—it would be a great hardship to fall on lower associations, which is the common destiny of the poor and decayed scholar. You will save me, Bessie ? ”

“ Indeed, I will ! ” And on this they clasped hands fervently.

“ Bessie, can we go to Italy together this winter ? I dare not go alone—I must have you to take care of me,” pleaded Harry.

“ I will take care of you, Harry.”—Bessie was smiling, tearful, blushing, and Harry said she was a dear, good girl, and he thanked her.

After that there was some exposition of ways and means, and Bessie, growing rosier, and rosier, told Harry the story of that famous nest-egg, concerning which she had been put to the blush before. He was very glad to hear of it—very glad, indeed, and much relieved ; for it would make that easy which he

had been dwelling on as most of all desirable, but hampered with difficulties that he could not himself remove. To see him cheer up at this practical point was delightful to Bessie—it was like his generous warm heart, equally open to give and to receive! She felt almost too happy, and blessed the simple forethought of the doctor which would justify them in remitting all care and anxiety to a future at least two years off, and afford Harry leisure and opportunity to regain his health and courage, and look about him for another vocation than that he had chosen originally.

“And you will find it, Harry, and perhaps you will love it better than London and dusty law. I am sure I shall,” prophesied Bessie gaily.

Harry laughed at her obstinate prejudice; she pointed out that the result had proved it a shrewd prejudice; and then they fell upon Italy and talked travel-talk with the sanguine anticipations of young people endowed with

limitless curiosity and a genuine taste for simple pleasures and each other's society. Harry's classical learning would be everywhere available for the enhancement of these pleasures.

At this stage of their previsions Mrs Musgrave intervened, and Bessie became conscious that the shades of evening were stealing over the landscape. Mrs Musgrave had on her bonnet, and was prepared to walk with Bessie on the road to Fairfield until they should meet Mr Musgrave returning from Hampton, who would accompany her the rest of the way. Harry wished to go in his mother's stead, but she was peremptory in bidding him stay where he was, and Bessie supported her: "No, Harry, not to-night, another time," she said, and he yielded at once.

"I'm sure his mother thanks you," said Mrs Musgrave as they went out. "He was so jaded this morning when he arrived, that the tears came into his eyes at a word, and Mr

Carnegie said that showed how thoroughly done he is."

Tears in Harry's eyes! Bessie thought of him with a most pitiful tenderness. "Oh," she said, "we must all be good to him—he does not look so ill to me, as he looks tired. We must keep up his spirits, and his hope for himself. I see no cause for despair."

"You are young, Bessie Fairfax, and it is easy for you to hope that everything will turn out for the best; but it is a sore trial for his father and me to have our expectation taken away. If Harry would have been advised when he left college he would never have gone to London. But it is no use talking of that now—I wish we could see what he is to do for a living—he will fret his heart out doing nothing at Brook."

"O Mrs Musgrave, with a quire of paper, and one of your grey-goose quills, Harry will be preserved from the mischief of doing no-

thing. You must let me come over, and cheer him sometimes."

"If things had turned out different with my poor son all might have been different. You have a good, affectionate disposition, Bessie, and there is nobody Harry prizes as he prizes you—but a young man whose health is indifferent, and no prospects—what is that for a young lady?" Mrs Musgrave began to cry.

"Don't cry, dear Mrs Musgrave—if you cry, that will hurt Harry worse than anything," said Bessie energetically. "He feels his disappointment more for his father and you than for himself. His health is not so bad but that it will mend, and as for his prospects—it is not wise to impress upon him that the cloud he is under now may never disperse. 'A cheerful heart doeth good like a medicine.' Have a cheerful heart again! It will come with trying."

They had not yet met Mr Musgrave though they were nearly a mile on the road, but Bessie

would not permit the poor mother to walk any further with her. They parted with a kiss : " And God for ever bless you, Bessie Fairfax, if you have it in your heart to be to Harry what nobody else can be," said his mother, laying her tremulous hands on the girl's shoulders. Bessie kissed her again, and went on her way rejoicing. This was one of the happiest hours her life had ever known. She was not tempted to dwell wantonly on the dark side of events present, and there were so many brighter possibilities in the future that she could entirely act out the divine precept to let the morrow take thought for the things of itself.

When Bessie Fairfax reached Fairfield, Roberts informed her in a depressed manner that her ladyship was waiting dinner. Bessie started at this view of her impolite absence, and hastened to the drawing-room to apologise. But Lady Latimer coldly waived her explanations, and Bessie felt very self-reproachful until an idea occurred to her what she would

do. After a brief retreat and rapid toilette, she reappeared with Harry's manuscript in her hand, and with simple craft displaying the roll, she said : " This is for us to read—a true story. It is not in print yet, but Mr Harry Musgrave writes a plain hand. We are to give him our opinion of it. I believe that, after all, he will be a poor author—one of my heroes, Lady Latimer."

" One of your heroes, Elizabeth ? There is nothing very heroic in Mr Logger," rejoined my lady softening, and holding out her hand for the manuscript. " Is the young man very ill ?"

" No—no—not so ill that we need fear his dying inglorious without giving the world something to remember him by ; but discouraged by the dicta of friends and physicians who consign him to idleness and obscurity for a year or two."

" Which idleness and obscurity I presume it is your wish to alleviate ?" said Lady Latimer with half contemptuous resignation.

Come to dinner now—we will read your hero's story afterwards."

Lady Latimer's personal interests were so few that it was a necessity for her generous soul to adopt the interests of other people. She kept Bessie reading until eleven o'clock, when she was dismissed to bed, and ordered to leave the manuscript below, lest she should sit up and read it when she ought to be asleep. But what Bessie might not do my lady was quite at liberty to do herself, and she made an end of the tale before she retired. And not only that. She wrote to Mr Logger to recommend a publisher, and to ask how proper payment could be assured to a young and unknown author. She described the story to the veteran critic as a sad pretty story of true love (which people go on believing in) sensibly written, without serious flaws of taste or grammar, and really worth reading if one had nothing else to do. In the morning she informed Bessie of what she had

done. Bessie was not quite sure that Harry would feel gratified at being placed under the protection of her ladyship and Mr Logger, but as she could not well revoke the letter that was written she said nothing against it, and Lady Latimer was busy and happy for a week in the expectation that she was doing something for "that unfortunate young man." But at the week's end Mr Logger dashed her confidence with the answer that he had not been able to meet with any publisher willing to pay money down for a sad pretty story of true love by an unknown author—sad pretty stories of true love were a drug in the literary market. She was grievously disappointed. Bessie was the same, and as she had confessed a hope to Harry she had to carry him the tidings of failure. If he was sorry it was for her regret—but they soon began to talk of other things. They had agreed that if good luck came they would be glad, and if bad luck they would pass it lightly over.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOODNESS PREVAILS.

DESIROUS as Lady Latimer was to do Mr Harry Musgrave a service her good-will towards him ended there. She perversely affected to believe that Miss Fairfax's avowed promise to him constituted no engagement, and on this plea put impediments in the way of her visits to Brook, lest a handle should be given to gossip. Bessie herself was not concerned to hinder gossip. With the exception of Lady Latimer, all her old friends in the Forest were ready to give her their blessing. The Wileys were more and more astonished that she should be so short-sighted, but Mr Phipps shook her by both hands and expressed his cordial approbation, and Miss Buff advised her to have her own

way, and let those who were vexed, please themselves again.

Bessie suffered hours of argument from my lady, who, when she found she could prevail nothing, took refuge in a sort of scornful, compassionate silence. These silences were, however, of brief duration. She appealed to Mr Carnegie, who gave her for answer that Bessie was old enough to know her own mind, and if that leant towards Mr Harry Musgrave—so much the better for him; if she were a weak, impulsive girl, he would advise delay and probation, but she was of full age, and had a good sensible head of her own; she knew Mr Harry Musgrave's circumstances, tastes, prejudices, and habits—what she would gain in marrying him, and what she would resign.—What more was there to say? Mr Laurence Fairfax had neither the power nor the will to interpose authoritatively; he made inquiries into Mr Harry Musgrave's University career, and talked of him to Mr Cecil Burleigh, who replied with

magnanimity, that but for the break-down of his health, he was undoubtedly one of those young men from whose early achievement and mental force the highest successes might have been expected in after-life. Thereupon Mr Laurence Fairfax and his gentle wife pitied him, and could not condemn Elizabeth.

Mrs Carnegie considered that Bessie manifested signal prudence, forethought, and trust in God, when she proposed that her nest-egg, which was now near a thousand pounds, should supply the means of living in Italy for a couple of years, without reference to what might come after. But when Elizabeth wrote to her Uncle Laurence to announce what manner of life she was preparing to enter upon, and what provision was made for it, though he admired her courage, he wrote back that it should not be so severely tested. It was his intention to give her the portion that would have been her father's—not so much as the old Squire had destined for her had she

married as he wished (that she knew had gone another way)—but a competence sufficient to live on whether at home or abroad. He told her that one-half of her fortune ought to be settled on Mr Harry Musgrave, to revert to her if he died first, and he concluded by offering himself as one of her trustees.

This generous letter made Bessie very glad, and having shown it to Lady Latimer at breakfast, she went off with it to Brook directly after. She found Harry in the sitting-room, turning out the contents of his old desk. In his hand at the moment of her entrance was the white rose that he had taken from her at Bayeux—it kept its fragrance still. She gave him her uncle's letter to read, and when he had read it, he said: "If I did not love you so much, Bessie, this would be a burden painful to bear."

"Then don't let us speak of it—let me bear it. I am pleased that my Uncle Laurence should be so good to us. When you meet I

know you will be friends. He is in elysium when he can get a good scholar to talk to, and he will want you to send him all sorts of archæological intelligence from Rome."

"I have a piece of news too—hopeful news from Christie," said Harry producing one of the artist's rapid scratches. "It is to tell me that he is on the committee of a new illustrated magazine of art which is to start at Christmas, and that he is sure I can help them with the letter-press department while we are in Italy."

"Of course you can! And they will require a story—that sweet story of yours has some picture bits that would be exquisite if they fell into the hands of a sympathetic artist. Let us send it to Christie, Harry dear!"

"Very well. Nothing venture, nothing have! The manuscript is with you—take Christie's letter for his address—you will see that he wants an answer without loss of time. He is going to be married very shortly, and will be out of town till November."

"I will despatch the story by to-day's post, and a few lines of what I think of it—independent criticism is useful sometimes."

Harry looked at her laughing, and saying with a humorous deprecation: "Bessie's independent criticism!"

Bessie blushed and laughed too, but steadfastly affirmed: "Indeed, Harry, if I did not think it the very prettiest story I ever read I would not tell you so! Lady Latimer said it was pretty—and you cannot accuse her of loving you too much."

"No! And that brings me to another matter. I wish you would come away from Fairfield—come here, Bessie. In this rambling old house there is room enough and to spare, and you shall have all the liberty you please. I don't see you as often or for as long as I want, and the order of things is quite reversed—I would much rather set out to walk to you, than wait and watch for your appearance."

"Had I not better go home? My little old nest under the thatch is empty, and the boys are away."

"Come here first for a week—we have never stayed in one house together since we were children. I want to see my dear little Bessie every hour of the day. At Fairfield you are caged. When her ladyship puts on her grand manner and towers, she is very daunting to a poor lover."

"She has not seen you since you left London, Harry. I should like you to meet—then, I think she might forgive us," said Bessie with a wistful regret. Sometimes she was highly indignant with my lady, but in the depths of her heart there was always a fund of affection, admiration, and respect for the idol of her childish days.

The morning but one after this Bessie's anxious desire that my lady and her dear Harry should meet was unexpectedly gratified. It was about half-way towards noon when she

was considering whether or no she could with peace and propriety bring forward her wish to go again to Brook when Lady Latimer hurried down from her sanctum which overlooked the drive, saying: "Elizabeth, here is young Mr Musgrave on horseback—run and bid him come in and rest! He is giving some message to Roberts, and going away."

"Oh, please, ask him yourself," said Bessie, but at the same moment she hastened out to the door.

It was a sultry, oppressive morning, and Harry looked languid and ill—more ill than Bessie had ever seen him look. She felt inexpressibly shocked and pained, and he smiled as if to relieve her, while he held out a letter that he had been on the point of entrusting to Roberts: "From that excellent fellow, Christie. Your independent criticism has opened his eyes to the beauties of my story, and he declares that he shall claim the landscape bits himself."

Lady Latimer advanced with a pale, grave face, and invited the young man to dismount. There was something of entreaty in her voice :

“The morning-room is the coolest, Elizabeth—take Mr Musgrave there. I shall be occupied until luncheon, but I hope you will be able to persuade him to stay.”

Bessie's lips repeated, “Stay ;” and Harry not unthankfully entered the house. He dropt into a great easy-chair, and put up one hand to cover his eyes, and so continued for several minutes. Lady Latimer stood an instant looking at him with a pitiful, scared gaze, and then, avoiding Bessie's face, she turned, and left the lovers together. Bessie laid her hand on Harry's shoulder and spoke kindly to him—he was tired, the atmosphere was very close and took away his strength. After awhile he recovered himself, and said something about Christie's friendliness, and perhaps, if *he* illustrated the story, they should see reminiscences of the manor-garden

and of Great Ashford, and other favourite spots in the Forest. They did not talk much or eagerly at all, but Christie's commendation of the sad pretty story of true love, was a distinct pleasure to them both, and especially to Harry. His mother had begged him to stop at home, and let the letter be sent over to Fairfield, but he wanted the gratification of telling Bessie his news himself; and the ride in the hot airless weather had been too fatiguing. Bessie took up a piece of work, and sat by the window, silent, soothing. He turned his chair to face her, and from his position he had a distant view of the sea—a dark blue line on the horizon. He had been fond of the sea and of boats from his first school-days at Hampton, and as he contemplated its great, remote calm, a longing to be out upon it took possession of him, which he immediately confessed to Bessie. Bessie did not think he need long in vain for that—it was easy of accomplishment. He said yes—Ryde was not far, and a Ryde

wherry was a capital craft for sailing. Just as he was speaking Lady Latimer came back bringing some delicious fruit for Harry's refreshment.

"What is that you are saying about Ryde?" she inquired quickly. "I am going to Ryde for a week or two, and as I shall take Elizabeth with me, you can come to us there, Mr Musgrave, and enjoy the salt-breezes. It is very relaxing in the Forest at this season."

Bessie by a glance supplicated Harry to be gracious, and in obedience to her mute entreaty he thanked her ladyship, and said it would give him the truest pleasure. My lady had never thought of going to Ryde until that moment, but since she had seen Harry Musgrave and had been struck by the tragedy of his countenance, and all that was meant by his having to fall out of the race of life so early, she was impelled by an irresistible goodness of nature to be kind and generous to him. Robust people, healthy, wealthy, and wise, she could

let alone, but poverty, sickness, or any manner of trouble, appealed straight to her noble heart, and brought out all her spirit of Christian fellowship. She was prompt and thorough in doing a good action, and when she met the young people at luncheon her arrangements for going to the island were all made, and she announced that the next day, in the cool of the evening, they would drive to Hampton and cross by the last boat to Ryde. This sudden and complete revolution in her behaviour was not owing to any change in principle, but to sheer pitifulness of temper. She had not realised before what an immense disaster and overthrow young Musgrave was suffering, but at the sight of his pathetic visage and weakened frame, and of Elizabeth's exquisite tenderness, she knew that such great love must be given to him for consolation, and a shield against despair. It was quite within the scope of her imagination to depict the temptations of a powerful and aspiring mind

reduced to bondage and inaction by the development of inherited disease—to herself it would have been of all fates the most terrible—and thus she fancied it for him. But in Harry Musgrave's nature there was no bitterness or fierce revolt, no angry sarcasm against an unjust world or stinging remorse for fault of his own. Defeat was his destiny, and he bowed to it as the old Greek heroes bowed to the decree of the gods, and laughed sometimes at the impotence of misfortune to fetter the free flight of his thoughts. And Elizabeth was his angel of peace.

CHAPTER XV.

CERTAIN OPINIONS.

THE house that Lady Latimer always occupied on her visits to Ryde was away from the town and the pier, amongst the green fields going out towards Binstead. It had a shaded garden down to the sea, and a landing-place of its own when the tide was in. A balcony, looking north, made the narrow drawing-room spacious, and my lady and her despatch-box were established in a cool room below, adjoining the dining-parlour. She did not like the pier or the strand, with their shoals of company in the season, and took her drives out on the white roads to Wootton and Newport, Osborne and Cowes, commonly accompanied by some poor friend to whom a drive was an unfrequent pleasure. She never trusted her-

self to a small boat, and as for the wherry that bore Harry Musgrave and Elizabeth every morning flying before the wind for three delicious hours, she appreciated its boasted safety so slightly that she was always relieved to see them safe back again, whether they landed at the foot of the garden, or came through the town. It was beautiful weather, with fine fresh breezes all the week, and Harry looked and felt so much like a new man at the end of it, that my lady insisted on his remaining a second week, when they would all return to the Forest together. He had given her the highest satisfaction by so visibly taking the benefit of her hospitality, and had made great way in her private esteem besides. Amongst her many friends and acquaintances then at Ryde, for every day's dinner she chose one gentleman for the sake of good talk that Mr Harry Musgrave might not tire, and the breadth and diversity of the young man's knowledge and interests surprised her.

One evening after some especially amusing conversation with a travelled doctor, who was great in the scientific study of botany and beetles, she said to Elizabeth while they were alone. "What a pity ! what a grievous pity ! There is no position brains and energy can win that Mr Harry Musgrave might not raise himself to if his health were equal to his mental capacity. And with what dignity and fortitude he bears his condemnation to a desultory, obscure existence ! I had no idea there could be so much sweet patience in a man. Do you anticipate that it will be always so ?"

"Harry is very happy now, and I do not look forward much or far," Elizabeth said quietly. "People say men are so different from women, but after all they must be more like women than like anything else. So I try sometimes to put myself in Harry's place, and I know there will be fluctuations — perhaps, even a sense of waste and blankness, now and then, and a waking up of regret. But he has

no envious littleness of mind and no irritability of temper—when he is feeling ill, he will feel low. But our life need not be dull or restricted, and he has naturally a most enjoying humour.”

“And he will have you—I think, after all, Elizabeth, you have found your vocation—to love and to serve; a blessed vocation for those called to it; but full of sorrows to those who take it up when the world and pride have disappointed them.”

Elizabeth knew that my lady was reflecting on herself. They were both silent for a few minutes, and then Elizabeth went on: “Harry and I have been thinking that a yacht would be an excellent establishment for us to begin with—a yacht that would be fit to coast along France, and could be laid up at Bordeaux while we rest for the winter at Arcachon; or if we are of a mind to go further, that would carry us to the Mediterranean. Harry loves a city, and Bologna attracts his present curiosity—I tell him because it was once a famous school of law.”

“Bologna is a most interesting city. He would be well amused there,” said my lady. “It has a learned society, and is full of antiquities and pictures. It is in the midst of a magnificent country too. I spent a month there once with Lord Latimer, and we found the drives in the vicinity unparalleled. You cannot do better than go to Bologna—take your yacht round to one of the Adriatic ports—to Venice. I can supply you with guide-books. I perceive that Mr Harry Musgrave must be well entertained—a Ryde wherry with you in the morning is the perfection of entertainment, but he has an evident relish for sound masculine discourse in the evening—we must not be too exacting.”

Bessie coloured slightly, and laughed. “I don’t think that I am very exacting,” she said. “I am sure whatever Harry likes, he shall do, for me ! I know he wants the converse of men ; he classes it with fine scenery and fresh air as one of the three delights that he most inclines to, since hard work is for-

bidden him. Bologna will be better than Arcachon for the winter."

"Yes—if the climate be suitable. We must find out what the climate is—or you may alter your plans again. I have not heard yet when the great event is to take place—when you are to be married?"

"My father thinks that Harry should avoid the late autumn in the Forest—the fall of the leaf," Bessie began with rosy diffidence.

"But you have made no preparations? And there are the settlements!" exclaimed Lady Latimer anxiously.

"Our preparations are going on. My Uncle Laurence and Mr Carnegie will be our trustees; they have consulted Harry, I know, and the settlements are in progress. Oh, there will be no difficulty."

"But the wedding will be at Abbotsmead, since Mr Laurence Fairfax gives his countenance?" Lady Latimer suggested interrogatively.

Bessie's blush deepened: "No. I have promised Harry that it shall be at Beech-hurst, and very quiet. Therefore when we return to the Forest I shall have to ask you to leave me at the doctor's house."

Lady Latimer was silent and astonished—then she said with emphasis: "Elizabeth, I cannot approve of that plan. If you will not go to Abbotsmead, why not be married from Fairfield? I shall be glad to render you every assistance."

"You are very, very kind, but Harry would not like it," pleaded Bessie.

"You are too indulgent, Elizabeth! Harry would not like it, indeed! Why should he have everything his own way?"

"O Lady Latimer! I am sure you would not have the heart to cross him yourself!" cried Bessie.

My lady looked up at her sharply, but Elizabeth's face was quite serious. "He has rallied wonderfully during the week—rallied

both his strength and his spirits. It is fortunate he has that buoyancy. Every girl loves a gay wedding!"

"It would be peculiarly distasteful to Harry under the circumstances; and I would not give him pain for the world," Bessie said warmly.

"He is as well able to bear a little contradiction as the rest of us," said Lady Latimer looking lofty. "In my day the lady was consulted. Now everything must be arranged to accommodate the gentleman. I'm sure we are grown very humble!"

Bessie looked meekly on the carpet, and did not belie my lady's words. Something in her air was provoking—perhaps that very meekness,—in certain lights so foreign to her character; for Lady Latimer coloured, and continued in her frostiest tone.

"If you are ashamed of the connection you are forming that justifies your not inviting the world to look on at your wedding—which

ought to be an hour of pride and triumph to a girl." Bessie's meekness vanished in a blush.

"And it will be an hour of triumph to me ! Ashamed ! Harry Musgrave is to me the best and dearest heart that breathes !" she exclaimed ; and my lady was too well advised to prolong the argument, especially as she felt that it would be useless.

Harry Musgrave was not grudging of his gratitude for real kindness, and though, when he was in his stronger mood, Lady Latimer was, perhaps, still disposed to huff him, the next hour she was as good as she knew how to be. The visit to the island was productive of excellent results in the way of a better understanding, and my lady made no more opposition to Elizabeth's leaving her, and taking up her abode in Mr Carnegie's house until her marriage.

For a day or two the triangular nest under the thatch felt small and confined to Bessie,

but one morning the rustic sweetness of honeysuckle blowing in at the open lattice awoke in her memory a thousand happy childish recollections, and brought back all the dear home-feelings. Then Harry Musgrave was more like his original self here than elsewhere. Insensibly he fell into his easy boyish pleasantries of manner, and announced himself as more secure of his fate when he found Bessie sitting in company with a work-basket in the pretty, low, old-fashioned drawing-room, perfumed with roses overflowing the china bowl. Bessie had a perfect notion of the fitness of things, and as simplicity of dress seemed best suited to her beauty in that place, she attired herself in her plainest and most becoming gown ; and Harry looked her over approvingly and called her his dear little Bessie again. The doctor, her mother, the children, every early friend out of the house, was glad, and congratulated her upon her return to the Forest and to them. And now and then, in

the dreamy length of the days when she sat thinking, all the interval of time, and all the change of scene, circumstance, and faces since she first went away, appeared to her like a dream of the night when it is gone.

Of course she had to listen to the moralities of this last vicissitude from her various friends—

Said Miss Buff confidentially: "There is a vast deal more in surroundings, Bessie, than people like to admit. We are all under their influence. If we had seen you at Abbotsmead, we might have pitied your sacrifice, but when we see you at the doctor's, in your sprigged cambric dresses, and your beautiful wavy hair in the style we remember, it seems the most right and natural thing in the world that you should marry Mr Harry Musgrave—no condescension in it. But I did not *quite* feel that while you were at Fairfield, though I commended your resolution to have your own way. Now that you are here, you are just Bessie

Fairfax—only the doctor's little daughter. And that goes in proof of what I always maintain—that grand people, where they are not known, ought never to divest themselves of the outward and visible signs of their grandness ; for nature has not been bountiful to them all with either wit or sense, manners or beauty, though there are toadies everywhere able to discern in them the virtues and graces suitable to their rank.”

“Lady Latimer looks her part upon the stage,” said Bessie.

“But how many don't. The Countess of Harbro,' for instance—who that did not know her would take her for anything but a common person ? Insolent woman she is ! She found fault with the choir to me last Sunday, as if I were a singing-mistress, and she paid my salary. Has old Phipps confessed how you have astonished him, and falsified his predictions ?”

“I am not aware that I have done anything

to astonish anybody. I fancied that I had pleased Mr Phipps rather than otherwise," said Bessie with a quiet smile.

"And so you have. He is gratified that a young lady of quality should have the pluck to make a marriage of affection in a rank so far below her own, considering nothing but the personal worth of the man she marries."

"I have never been able to discover the hard and fast conventional lines that are supposed to separate ranks. There is an affectation in these matters which practically deludes nobody. A liberal education and the refinements of wealth are too extensively diffused for those whose pride it is that they have done nothing but vegetate on one spot of land for generations to hold themselves aloof as a superior caste. The pretensions of some of them are evident—but only evident to be ridiculous—like the pretensions of those who, newly enriched by trade, decline all but what they describe as carriage-company!"

“The poor gentry are eager enough to marry money, but that does not prevent them sneering at the way the money is made,” Miss Buff said. “Even Lady Latimer herself, speaking of the family who have taken Admiral Parkins’ house for three months, said it was a pity they should come to a place like Beechhurst ; for the gentle-people would not call upon them, and they would feel themselves above associating with the trades-people. They are the great tea-dealers in Cheapside.”

“Oh, if they are not vulgar and ostentatious, Lady Latimer will soon forget her prejudice against the tea.”

“And invite them to her garden-parties like the rest of us ? No doubt she will ; she likes to know everybody. Then some connection with other people of her acquaintance will come out, or she will learn that they are influential with the charitable institutions by reason of their handsome donations, or that they have an uncle high in the Church, or a

daughter married into the brewing interest. Oh, the ramifications of society are infinite, and it is safest not to lay too much stress on the tea to begin with."

"Much the safest," Mr. Phipps, who had just come in, agreed. "The tea-dealer is very rich, and money (we have Solomon's word for it) is a defence. He is not aware of needing her ladyship's patronage. I expect, Miss Fairfax, that drifting up and down, and to and fro in your vicissitudes, you have found all classes much more alike than different?"

"Yes. The refinements and vulgarities are the monopoly of no degree; only, I think, the conceit of moral superiority is common to us all," said Bessie—and she laughed.

"And well it may be, since the axiom that *noblesse oblige* has fallen into desuetude, and the word of a gentleman is no more to swear by than a huxter's! Tom and Jerry's wives go to court, and the arbitrary edict of fashion constitutes the latest barbaric importation *bon-*

ton for a season—I have been giving Harry Musgrave the benefit of my wanderings in Italy thirty years ago, and he is so enchanted that you will have to turn gipsy again next spring, Miss Fairfax.”

“It will suit me exactly—a mule or an ox-cart instead of the train, bye-ways for highways, and sauntering for speed. Did I not tell you long ago, Mr Phipps, that the gipsy wildness was in the Fairfax blood, and that some day it would be my fate to travel ever so far and wide, and to come home again browner than any berry?”

“Why, you see, Miss Fairfax, the wisest seer is occasionally blind, and you are that rare bird, a consistent woman. Knowing the great lady you most admired, I feared for you some fatal act of imitation. But, thank God, you have had grace given you to appreciate a simple-minded, loveable fellow, who will take you out of conventional bonds, and help you to bend your life round in a perfect

circle. You are the happiest woman it has been my lot to meet with."

Bessie did not speak, but she looked up gratefully in the face of her old friend.

CHAPTER XVI.

BESSIE'S LAST RIDE WITH THE DOCTOR.

MR CARNEGIE complained that he had less of his dear Bessie's company than anybody else by reason of his own busy occupation, and one clear September morning, when the air was wonderfully fresh and sweet after a thunder-storm during the night, he asked her to come out for a last ride with him before Harry Musgrave carried her away. Bessie donned her habit and hat, and went gladly—the ride would serve as a leave-taking of some of her friends in the cottages whom otherwise she might miss.

In the village they met Miss Buff, going off to the school to hear the Bible read, and teach the Catechism, works of supererogation under the new system which Mr Wiley had

thankfully remitted to her, on account of her popularity with parents and children.

“Your duty to your neighbour and your duty to God, and the ten commandments—nothing else, because of the Dissenters,” she explained in a bustle. “Imagine the vulgarity of an education for the poor from which the Bible may be omitted ! Dreadful ! I persuade the children to get certain of the psalms, proverbs, and parables by heart out of school. Bless you, they like that ! but as for teaching them such abstract knowledge as what an adverb or an isthmus is, or the height of Mount Blanc, I defy you ! And it is all fudge ! Will they sweep a room or make an apple-dumpling the better for it ? Not they ! But fix it in their minds that whatever their hands find to do they must do it with their might, and there is a chance that they will sweep into the corners and pare the apples thin. But I have no time to spare, so good-bye, good-bye !”

The general opinion of Beechhurst was with Miss Buff, who was making a stand upon the ancient ways in opposition to the superior master of Lady Latimer's selection, whose chief tendency was towards grammar, physical geography, and advanced arithmetic, which told well in the inspector's report. Miss Buff was strong also in the matter of needlework and knitting—she would even have had the boys knit ; but here she had sustained defeat.

Mr Carnegie's first visit was to Mrs Christie, who, since she had recovered her normal state of health, had resumed her habit of drugging and complaining. Her son was now at home, and when the doctor and Bessie rode across the green to the wheelwright's house there was the artist at work, with a companion under his white umbrella. His companion wore a maize piqué dress and a crimson sash ; a large leghorn hat, garnished with poppies and wheat-ears, hid her face.

"There is Miss Fairfax herself, Janey !"

whispered young Christie in an encouraging tone. "Don't be afraid!"

Janey half raised her head, and gazed at Bessie with shy, distrustful eyes. Bessie, quite unconscious, reined in Miss Hoyden under the shadow of a spreading tree to wait while the doctor paid his visit indoors. She perceived that there was a whispering between the two under the white umbrella, and with a pleasant recognition of the young man she looked another way. After the lapse of a few minutes, he approached her, an unusual modest suffusion overspreading his pale face, and said—

"Miss Fairfax, there is somebody here you once knew. She is very timid, and says she dares not claim your remembrance because you must have thought she had forgotten you."

Bessie turned her head towards the diffident small personage, who was regarding her from the distance. "Is it Janey Fricker?" she asked with a pleased, amused light in her face.

"It is Janey Christie"—in fact, the artist

was now making his wedding-tour, and Janey was his wife.

"Oh," said Bessie, "then this was why your portfolio was so full of sketches at Yarmouth. I wish I had known before."

Janey's face was one universal blush as she came forward, and looked up in Miss Fairfax's handsome, beneficent face. There had always been an indulgent protectiveness in Bessie's manner to the master-mariner's little daughter, and it came back quite naturally. Janey expected hasty questions, perhaps reproaches, perhaps coldness, but none of these were in Bessie's way. She had never felt herself ill-used by Janey, and in the joy of the sudden encounter did not recollect that she had anything to forgive. She said how she had lived in the hope of a meeting again with Janey some day, and what a delightful thing it was to meet thus—to find that her dear little comrade at school was married to Harry Musgrave's best friend. Janey had heard from her husband all the story

of Bessie's faithful love, but she was too timid and self-doubting to be very cordial or responsive. Bessie, therefore, talked for both—promised herself a renewal of their early friendship, and expressed an hospitable wish that Mr Christie would bring his wife to visit them in Italy next year when he took his holiday. Christie promised that he would, and thought Miss Fairfax more than ever good and charming; but Janey was almost happier when Bessie rode away with Mr Carnegie, and she was permitted to retire into seclusion again under the white umbrella. The artist had chosen him a helpmeet who could be very devoted in private life, but who would never care for his professional honours or public reputation. Bessie heard afterwards that the master-mariner was dead, and the place in her heart that he had held was now her husband's. With her own more expansive and affectionate nature, she felt a genial warmth of satisfaction in the meeting, and as she trotted along with

the doctor, she told him about Janey at school, and thought herself most fortunate to have been riding with him that morning.

"For I really fear the little shy creature would never have come near me had I not fallen in with her where she could not escape," said she.

"Christie has been even less ambitious in his marriage than yourself, Bessie," was the doctor's reply. "That one-ideal little woman may worship him, but she will be no help. She will not attract friends to his house, even if she be not jealous of them; and he will have to go out and leave her at home, and that is a pity; for an artist ought to live in the world."

"She is docile, but not trustful. Oh, he will tame her, and she will try to please him," said Bessie cheerfully. "She fancied that I must have forgotten her, when there was rarely a day that she did not come into my mind. And she says the same of me—yet

neither of us ever wrote or made any effort to find the other out !”

“Let us hope that you have both contracted a more serviceable friendship in another direction,” said the doctor, and Bessie laughed. She was aware that his estimate of feminine friendship was not exalted.

About half a mile further, where a bye-road turned off towards Fairfield, the riders came upon a remarkable group in high debate over a donkey—Lady Latimer, Gampling the tinkers, and the rural policeman. My lady instantly summoned Mr Carnegie to her succour in the fray, which, to judge from her countenance and the stolid visage of the emissary of the law, was obstinate. It appeared that the policeman claimed to arrest the donkey, and convey him to the pound. The dry and hungry beast had been tethered by his master in the early morning where a hedge and margin of sward bordered the domain of Admiral Parkins. Uninstructed in modern law, he

broke loose, and strayed along the green, cropping here and there a succulent shoot of thorn or thistle, until, when approaching repletion, he was surprised by the policeman, reprimanded, captured, and led ignominiously towards the gaol for vagrant animals—a donkey that everybody knew.

“He’s took the innocent ass into custody, and me he’s going to summons, and get fined!” Gampling exclaimed, his indignation not abated by the appearance of another friend upon the scene—for a friend he still counted the doctor, though he persisted in his refusal to mend his kettles and pots and pans.

“Is not this an excess of zeal, Cobb?” remonstrated Mr Carnegie. “Suppose you let the ass off this time, and consider him warned not to do it again?”

“Sir, my instructions is not to pass over any infringement of the new h’act. Straying is to be put down,” said Cobb stiffly.

"This here ass have earned his living honest a matter of eight year, and nought ever laid agen his character afore by high nor low," pleaded Gampling, growing pathetic as authority grew more stern. "Her ladyship and the doctor will speak a good word for him, and there's others as will."

"Afore the bench it may be of vally, and go to lowering the fine," said the invincible exponent of the law. "I ain't nothing to do with that."

"I'll tell you where it is, Cobb," urged Gampling, swelling into anger again. "This here ass knows more o' nat'ral justice than the whole boiling o' new h'acts. He'd never be the man to walk into her ladyship's garden an' eat up her flower-beds—reason why—he'd get a jolly good hiding if he did. But he says to hisself, he says, when he sees a nice bite o' clover or a sow-thistle by the roadside—'This here's what's left for the poor, the fatherless,

and the widder—it ain't much, but thank God for small mercies'—an' he falls to. Who's he robbed, I should like to know?"

"You must ask the Admiral that when you come up before the magistrates on Saturday," rejoined Cobb severely—his professional virtue sustained, perhaps, by the presence of witnesses.

Gambling besides being an itinerant tinker was also an itinerant political preacher, and seeing that he could prevail nothing by secular pleas, he betook himself to his spiritual armoury, and in a voice of sour derision that made Bessie Fairfax cringe asked the doctor if he had yet received the Devil's Decalogue according to h'act of parliament and justices' notices that might be read on every wall—and he proceeded to recite it: "Thou shalt remove the old land marks, and enter into the fields of the poor—Thou shalt wholly reap the corners of thy fields, and gather the gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave nothing for the poor and the stranger—if a wayfarer that

is a-hungered pluck the ears of corn and eat, thou shalt hale him before the magistrates, and he shall be cast into prison—Thou shalt turn away thy face from every poor man, and if thy brother ask bread of thee, thou shalt give him neither money nor food.”

Mr Carnegie made a gesture to silence the tinker, for he had thrown himself into an oratorical attitude, and shouted out the new commandments at the top of his voice, emphasising each clause with his right fist brought down each time more passionately on the palm of his left hand. But his humour had grown savage, and with his eyes glowing like hot coals in his blackened visage he went on, his tone rising to a hoarse, hysteric yell: “Thou shalt oppress the poor, and forbid to teach the Gospel in the schools, lest they learn to cry unto their God, and He hear them, and they turn again and rend thee”——

“What use is there in saying the thing that is not, Gampling?” demanded Lady Lati-

mer impetuously. "The Bible is read in our schools. And if you working-men take advantage of the privileges that you have won, you ought to be strong enough, both in and out of parliament, to prevent any new act being made in violation of the spirit of either law or gospel."

"I can't argy with your ladyship—it would be uncivil to say you talk bosh," replied the tinker as suddenly despondent as he had been furious. "I know that every year makes this world worse for poor honest folk to live in, an' that there's more an' more h'acts to break one's shins over. Who would ha' thowt as ever my old ass could arn me a fine an' costs o' a summons by nibbling a mouthful o' green meat on the Queen's highway, God bless her! I've done."

My lady endeavoured to make Gampling hear that she would pay his fine (if fined he were), but he refused to listen, and went off,

shaking his head, and bemoaning the hard pass the world was come to.

"It is almost incredible the power of interference that is given to the police," said Lady Latimer. "That wretched young Burt and his mother were taken up by Cobb last week and made to walk to Hampton for lying on the heath, asleep in the sun—nothing else—that was their crime. Fortunately the magistrates had the humanity to discharge them."

"Poor souls, they are stamped for vagabonds! But young Burt will not trouble police or magistrates much longer now," said the doctor.

In fact, he had that very morning done with troubling anybody. When Mr Carnegie pulled up ten minutes later at the door of a forlorn hovel which was the present shelter of the once decent widow, he had no need to dismount. "Ride on, Bessie," he said softly, and Bessie rode on. Widow Burt came out to

speak to the doctor : her lean face scorched to the colour of a brick, her clothing ragged, her hair unkempt, her eyes wild as the eyes of a hunted animal.

"He's gone, sir," she said, pointing indoors to where a long, motionless figure seated in a chair was covered with a ragged patch-work quilt. The doctor nodded gravely—paused—asked if she were alone.

"Mrs Wallop sat up with us last night—she's very good is Mrs Wallop—but first thing this morning Bunny came along to fetch her to his wife, and she'd hardly got out o' sight, when poor Tom stretched himself like a bairn that's waked up, and is going to drop off to sleep again, an' with one great sigh, was dead—Miss Wort comes most mornings—here she is."

Yes, there was Miss Wort, plunging head foremost through the heather by way of making a short cut. She saw at a glance what had happened, and taking both the poor

mother's hands in her own, she addressed the doctor with tears in her eyes and tremulous anger in her voice: "I shall always say that it is a bad and cruel thing to send boys to prison, or anybody whose temptation is hunger—how can we tell what we should do ourselves? We are not wiser than the Bible, and we are taught to pray God lest we be poor and steal—Tom would never have come to be what he was but for that dreadful month at Whitchester. Instead of shutting up village-boys and hurting their health if they have done anything wrong, why can't they be ordered to wear a fool's cap for a week, going about their ordinary work? Our eyes would be on them, and they would not have a chance of picking and stealing again; it would give us a little more trouble at first, but not in the long run, and save taxes for prisons. People would say, 'There goes a poor thief,' and they would be sorry for him, and wonder why he did it—and we ought to look after our own things. And

then if they turned out incorrigible, they might be shut up or sent out of the way of temptation. Oh, if those who have the power were only a little more considerate, and would learn to put themselves in their place!"

Mr Carnegie said that Miss Wort's queer suggestion was capable of development, and there was too much sending of poor and young people to prison for light offences—offences of ignorance often, for which a reprimand and compensation would be enough—Bessie had never seen him more saddened.

Their next and last visit was to Littlemire. Mr Moxon was in his garden, working without his coat. He came forward, putting the threadbare garment on, and begged Miss Fairfax to go upstairs and see his wife. This was one of her good days, as she called the days when the aching weariness of her perpetual confinement was a degree abated, and she welcomed her visitor with a cry of plaintive joy, kissed

her, gazed at her fondly through glittering tears.

Bessie did not know that she had been loved so much. Girl-like, she had brought her tribute of flowers to the invalid's room, had wondered at this half paralysed life that was surrounded by such an atmosphere of peace; and when, during her last visit, she had realised what a compensation for all sorrow was this peace, she had not yet understood what an ardour of sympathy kept the poor sufferer's heart warm towards those whose brighter lot had nothing in common with her own.

"Oh, my love," she said in a sweet, thrilling voice, "dear Harry Musgrave has been to tell me of his happiness—I am so glad for you both, so very, very glad!" She did not pause to let Bessie respond, but ran on with her recollections of Harry since he was a boy, and came first to read with her husband. "His

thoughtfulness was really quite beautiful—he never forgot to be kind. Oh, my dear, you may thoroughly rely on his fine, affectionate temper! Rarely did he come to a lesson without bringing me some message from his mother and little present in his hand—a few flowers, a spring chicken, some nice fruit, a partridge. This queer rustic scaffold for my books and work—Harry constructed it himself, and I would not exchange it for the most elegant and ingenious of whatnots. I could do nothing for him but listen to his long thoughts and aspirations—that was when you were out of hearing—and he could neither talk nor write to his dear little Bessie.”

“It was a great gap, but it did not make us strangers,” said Bessie.

“When he went to Oxford he sent us word of his arrival, and how he liked his college and his tutor, matters that were as interesting to us as if he had been our own. And when he found how welcome his letters were, he wrote

to Mr Moxon often, and sent him any report or pamphlet that he thought might please him ; and several times he gave himself the trouble both at the Bodleian and in London to search for and copy out extracts from works that Mr Moxon wanted, and had no means of procuring here. You can have no idea how helpful he has been to my husband in such things. Poor fellow, what a grief it was to us that term he had to stay away from Oxford on account of his health ! Already we began to fear for the future, but his buoyant spirit would not anticipate any permanent hindrance to his progress—and that check did make him more prudent. But it is not to be—he sees himself cut short of the career where he planned to be famous—he gives way, however, to neither anger nor repining. Oh, my love, that I could win you to believe that if you clasp this cross to your heart, as the gift of Him who cannot err, you will never feel it a burden.”

Bessie smiled. She did not feel it a burden

now, and Harry was not abandoned to carry its weight alone. She did not speak : she was not apt at the expression of her religious feelings, but they were sincere as far as life had taught her. She could have lent her ears for a long while to Harry Musgrave's praises without growing weary, but the vicar now appeared, followed by the doctor, talking in a high, cheerful voice of that discovery he had made of a remarkable mathematical genius in Littlemire. "A most practical fellow, a wonderful hard head—will turn out an enterprising engineer, an inventor, perhaps, has the patience of Job himself, and an infinite genius for taking pains."

Bessie recollected rather pathetically having once heard the sanguine, good vicar, use very similar terms in speaking of her beloved Harry.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

TOWARDS the end of September Harry Musgrave and Bessie Fairfax were married. Lady Latimer protested against this conclusion by her absence, but she permitted Dora Meadows to go to the church to look on. The wedding differed but very little from other weddings. Harry Musgrave was attended by his friend Forsyth, and Polly and Totty Carnegie were the bridesmaids. Mr Moxon married the young couple, and Mr Carnegie gave the bride away. Mr Laurence Fairfax was present, and the occasion was further embellished by little Christie and Janey in their recent wedding garments, and by Miss Buff and Mr Phipps, whose cheerful appearance in company gave rise to some ingenious, prophetic remarks.

The village folks pronounced the newly wedded pair to be the handsomest they had seen married at Beechhurst church for many a long year, and perhaps it was lucky that Lady Latimer stayed away; for there was nothing in Mr Harry Musgrave's air or countenance to cheat her into commiseration.

"Elizabeth looked lovely—so beautifully happy," Dora Meadows reported. "And Mr Harry Musgrave went through the ceremony with composure—Miss Buff said he was as cool as a cucumber—I should think he is a faithless unsentimental sort of person, Aunt Olympia."

"Indeed—because he was composed?" inquired my lady coldly.

Dora found it easier to express an opinion than to give her reasons for it—all that Aunt Olympia could gather from her rather incoherent attempts at explanation was that Mr Harry Musgrave had possibly feigned to be worse than he was until he had made sure of Elizabeth's tender heart—for he appeared to

be in very good case both as to health and spirits.

“He might have died for Elizabeth if she had not loved him—and whatever he is or is not, he most assuredly would never voluntarily have given up the chances of an honourable career for the sake of living in idleness even with Elizabeth! You talk nonsense, Dora! There may be persons as foolish and contemptible as you suppose, but Elizabeth has more wit than to have set her affections on such a one.” Poor Dora was silenced. My lady was peremptory and decisive, as usual. When Dora had duly repented of her silly suggestion, Aunt Olympia’s natural curiosity to hear everything prevailed over her momentary caprice of ill-humour, and she was permitted to recite the wedding in all its details—even to Mrs Musgrave’s silk gown and the pretty little bridesmaids’ dresses. The bridegroom only she prudently omitted—and was sarcastically rebuked for the omission by and by with the

query: "And the bridegroom was nowhere then?"

The bells broke out several times in the course of the day, and the event served for a week's talk after it was over. The projected yacht voyage had been given up, and the young people travelled in all simplicity, with very little baggage, and no attendant except Mrs Betts. They went through Normandy until they came to Bayeux, where Madame Fournier was spending the long vacation at the house of her brother the canon, as her custom was. In the twilight of a hot autumnal evening they went to call upon her. Lancelot's watering-can had diffused its final shower, and the oleanders and pomegranates, grateful for the refreshing coolness, were giving out their most delicious odours. The canon and Madame were sipping their *café noir* after dinner, seated in the verandah towards the garden, and Madame Bette, the toil of the day over, was dozing and reposing

under the bowery sweet clematis at the end by her own domain.

The elderly people welcomed their young visitors with hospitable warmth. Two more chairs were brought out, and two cups of *café noir*, and the visit was prolonged into the warm harvest moonlight with news of friends and acquaintances. Bessie heard that the venerable *curé* of St Jean's still presided over his flock at Caen, and occupied the chintz edifice, like a shower-bath, which was the school-confessional. Miss Foster was married to a *brave fermier*, and Bessie was assured that she would not recognise that depressed and neuralgic *demoiselle* in the stout and prosperous *fermière* she had developed into. Mdlle. Adelaide was also married ; and Louise, that pretty portress, in spite of the raids of the conscription amongst the young men of her *pays*, had found a shrewd young innkeeper, the only son of a widow, who was so wishful to convert her into Madame at the sign of the

Croix Rouge, that she had consented, and now another Louise, also pretty, took cautious observation of visitors, before admission, through the little trap of the wicket in the *Rue St Jean*.

Then Madame Fournier inquired with respectful interest concerning her distinguished pupil, Madame Chiverton, of whose splendid marriage in Paris a report had reached her through her nephew. Was Monsieur Chiverton so very rich? was he so very old and ugly? was he good to his beautiful wife? Monsieur Chiverton, Bessie believed, was perfectly devoted and submissive to his wife—he was not handsome nor youthful—he had great estates and held a conspicuous position. Madame replied with an air of satisfaction that proud Miss Ada would be in her element, then; for she was born to be a grand lady, and her own family was so poor that she was utterly without *dot*—else, added Madame with some mystery, she might have

found a *parti* in the imperial court—there had been a brave marshal who was also duke. Here the amiable old lady checked herself, and said with kind re-assurance to the unambitious Bessie: “But, *ma chérie*, you have chosen well for your happiness. Your Harry is excellent—you have both such gaiety of heart—like *us*, not like the English who are *si maussade* often.”

Bessie would not allow that the English are *maussade*, but Madame refused to believe herself mistaken.

Mr and Mrs Harry Musgrave still carry their gaiety of heart wherever they go. They are not fashionable people, but people like to know them. They have adopted Italy for their country, and are most at home in Florence, but they do not find their other home in England too far off for frequent visits.

They are still only two, and move about

often and easily, and see more than most travellers do ; for they charter queer private conveyances for themselves, and leave the beaten ways for devious paths that look attractive, and often turn out great successes. It was during one of these excursions—an excursion into the Brianza—that they not long ago fell in with a large party of old friends from England, come together fortuitously at Bellagio. Descending early in the evening from the luxuriant hills across which they had been driving through a long green June day, they halted at the hospitable open gate of the Villa Giulia. There was a pony-carriage at the door, and another carriage just moving off after the discharge of its freight.

“O Aunt Olympia, look here ! Mr Harry Musgrave and Elizabeth !” cried a happy voice, and there, behold, was my Lady Latimer and Dora—Lady Lucas now and Sir Edward ; and turning back to see, and asking : “Who ? who ?” came Mr Oliver Smith and

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his sisters, and Mr Cecil Burleigh and his dear Julia.

To Bessie it was a delightful encounter, and Harry Musgrave, if his enthusiasm was not quite so eager, certainly enjoyed it as much ; for his disposition was always sociable. My lady, after a warm embrace and six words to Elizabeth, said : “ You will dine with me—we are all dining together this evening,” and she communicated her commands to one of the attendants. It was exactly as at home—my lady took the lead, and everybody was under her orders. Bessie liked it for old custom’s sake ; Mrs Cecil Burleigh stood a little at a loss, and asked : “ What are we to do ? ”

The Cecil Burleighs were not staying at the Villa Giulia, they were at another hotel on the hill above, and the Lucases, abroad on their wedding tour, were at a villa on the edge of the lake. They had been making a picnic with Lady Latimer and her party that day,

and were just returning when the young Musgraves appeared. The dinner was served in a room looking upon the garden, and afterwards the company walked out upon the terraces, fell into groups and exchanged news. My lady had already enjoyed long conversations with Mr Cecil Burleigh and Sir Edward Lucas, and she now took Mr Harry Musgrave to talk to. Harry slipped his hand within his wife's arm to make her a third in the chat, but as it was information on Roman politics and social reforms my lady chiefly wanted, Bessie presently released herself, and joined the wistful Dora, who was longing to give her a brief history of her own wooing and wedding. Before the tale was told Sir Edward joined them in the rose-bower whither they had retreated, and contributed some general news from Norminster and Abbotsmead and the neighbourhood,—Lady Angleby had adopted another niece for spaniel, *vice* Mrs Forbes promoted to Kirkham Vicarage, and her favourite

clergyman, Mr Jones, had been made rural dean; Mrs Stokes had a little girl: Mrs Chiverton was carrying on a hundred beneficent projects to the Woldshire world's wonder and admiration—she had even prevailed against Morte.

“And I believe she would have prevailed had poor Gifford lived—she is a most energetic woman,” Sir Edward said. Bessie looked up inquiringly. “Mr Gifford died of malignant fever last autumn,” Sir Edward told her. “He went to Morte in pursuit of some incorrigible poacher when fever was raging there, and took it in its most virulent form—his death proved an irresistible argument against the place, and Blagg made a virtue of necessity, and razed his hovels.”

Bessie heard further that her Uncle Laurence Fairfax had announced the principle that it is unwise for landowners to expect a direct profit from the cottages and gardens of their labouring tenants, and was putting it into practice

on the Kirkham estates, to the great comfort and advantage of his dependents.

"My Edward began it," whispered Dora, not satisfied that her husband should lose the honour that to him belonged.

"Yes," said Bessie, "I remember what sensible kind views he always took of his duties and responsibilities."

"And another thing he has done," continued the little lady. "While other men are enclosing every waste road-side scrap they dare, he has thrown open again a large meadow by the river which once upon a time was free to the villagers on the payment of a shilling a head for each cow turned out upon it. The gardens to the new cottages are planted with fruit-trees, and you cannot think what interest is added to the people's lives when they have to attend to what is pleasant and profitable for themselves. It cannot be a happy feeling to be always toiling for a master, and never for one's own—There!—Edward has taken him-

self off, so I may tell you that there never was anybody so good as he is, so generous and considerate."

Dora evidently regarded her spouse with serious, old-fashioned devotion and honour. Bessie smiled. She could have borne an equal tribute to her dear Harry, and probably if Mrs Cecil Burleigh had been as effusive as these young folks, she might have done the same ; for while they talked in the rose-bower Mr Cecil Burleigh and his wife came by, she leaning on his arm and looking up and listening as to the words of an oracle.

"Is she not sweet ? What a pity it would have been had those two not married," said Dora softly, and they passed out of sight.

"Come out, and see the roses," Lady Latimer said to Elizabeth through the window early the next morning. "They are beautiful with the dew upon them."

Harry Musgrave and his wife were at breakfast with a good deal of litter about the room

—botanical and other specimens were on the window-sill, on the table was a sheaf of popular Italian street songs, collected in various cities, and numerous loose leaves of manuscript. Harry had decided that Bellagio was a pleasant spot to rest in for a week or so, and Bessie had produced their work in divers kinds. They were going to have a delightful quiet morning of it, when my lady tapped on the glass, and invited Elizabeth out to admire the roses.

“Don’t stay away long,” whispered Harry to his wife, rising to pay his compliments.

He did not reseate himself to enjoy his tranquil labours for nearly an hour, and Bessie stood in her cool white dress like a statue of Patience, hearing Lady Latimer discourse until the sun had evaporated the dew from the roses. Then Miss Juliana and Miss Charlotte appeared, returning from a stroll beyond the bounds of the garden, and announced that the day was growing very hot—“Yes—it is almost too hot to walk now—but will you come to

my room, Elizabeth ? I have some photographs that I am sure would interest you," urged my lady—she seemed surprised and displeased when Harry entreated comically that his wife might not be taken away, waving his hand to the numerous tasks that awaited them.

"We also have photographs—let us compare them in the drowsy hours of afternoon," said he, and when Bessie offered to hush his odd speeches he boldly averred that she was indispensable : "She has allowed me to get into the bad habit of not being able to work without her."

My lady could only take her leave with a hope that they would be at leisure later in the day, and was soon after seen to foregather with an American gentleman as ardent in the pursuit of knowledge as herself. Afterwards she found her way to the village-school, and had an instructive interview with an old priest, and on the way back to the Villa Giulia, fall-

ing in with a very poor woman and two bare-footed little boys, her children, she administered charitable relief and earned many heartfelt blessings. The review of photographs took place in the afternoon as Harry suggested, and in the cool of the evening, after the *table d'hôte*, they had a boat on the lake, and paid the Lucases a visit before their departure for Como. Then they sauntered home to their inn by narrow, circuitous lanes between walled gardens—steep, stony lanes where, by and by, they came upon an iron gate standing open for the convenience of a man who was busy within—amongst the graves; for this was the little cemetery of Bellagio. It had its grand ponderosity in stone and marble sacred to the memory of noble dust, and a throng of poor iron crosses, leaning this way and that amidst the unkempt tall grasses.

Lady Latimer walked in; Harry Musgrave and Bessie waited outside. My lady had many questions to ask of the gardener about

the tenants of the vault beneath the huge monument, and many inscriptions upon the wall to read—pathetic, quaint, or fulsome. At length she turned to rejoin her companions. They were gazing through a locked grate into a tiny garden where were two graves only—a verdant little spot over which the roses hung in clouds of beauty and fragrance. An inscription on a slab sunk in the wall stated that this piece of ground was given for a burial-place to his country-people by an Englishman who had there buried his only son. The other denizen of the narrow plat was Dorothea Fairfax, at whose head and feet were white marble stones, the sculpture on them as distinct as yesterday. Bessie turned away with tears in her eyes.

“What is it?” said my lady sharply, and peered through the grate. Harry Musgrave had walked on. When Lady Latimer looked round her face was stern and cold, and the pleasant light had gone out of it. Without

meeting Elizabeth's glance, she spoke. "The dead are always in the right—the living always in the wrong—I had forgotten that it was at Bellagio Dorothy died. Has Oliver seen it, I wonder? I must tell him." Yes, Oliver had been there with his other sisters in the morning—they had not forgotten, but they hoped that dear Olympia's steps would not wander round by that way.

However, my lady made no further sign except by her unwonted silence. She left the Villa Guilia the following day with all her party, her last words to Elizabeth being: "You will let me know when you are coming to England, and I will be at Fairfield. I would not miss seeing you—it seems to me that we belong to one another in some fashion. Good-bye."

Bessie went back to Harry over his work rather saddened. "I do love Lady Latimer, Harry—her very faults and her foibles," she said. "I must have it by inheritance."

"If you had expressed a wish perhaps she would not have gone so suddenly. She appears to have no object in life but to serve other people even while she rules them. Don't look so melancholy! she is not unhappy—she is not to be pitied."

"O Harry! Not unhappy and so lonely?"

"My dear child, all the world is lonely more or less—she more, we less. But doing all the good she can—and so much good—she must have many hours of pure and high satisfaction. I am glad we have met."

And Bessie was glad. These chance meetings so far away gave her sweet intervals of reverie about friends at home. She kept her tender heart for them, but had never a regret that she had left them all for Harry Musgrave's sake. She sat musing with lovely pensive face. Harry looked up from his work again. The sky was heavenly serene, there was a cool

air stirring, and slow moving shadows of cloud were upon the lake.

"I am tired of these songs just now," said Harry rising and stepping over to the window where his wife sat. "This is a day to find out something new—let us go down the garden to the landing, and take a boat. We will ask for a roll or two of bread and some wine, and we can stay as late as we please."

Bessie came out of her dream, and did his bidding with a grace. And that was the day's diversion.

THE END.

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